POETRY IN SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

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Studies in Old Norse Literature

Print ISSN 2514-0701
Online ISSN 2514-071X

Series Editors
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Margaret Clunies Ross

D. S. BREWER

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First published 2022
D. S. Brewer, Cambridge

ISBN 978 1 84384 639 0 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 80010 611 6 (ePDF)

D. S. Brewer is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620–2731, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

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This publication is printed on acid-free paper

✧ In memory of Kari Ellen Gade (1953–2022) ✧
friend and colleague

CONTENTS

List of Tables viii
Acknowledgements ix
Sigla for Poetry Cited in this Book x
List of Abbreviations xxix
A Note on *Heiti* and Kennings xxxvii

Introduction 1

1 The Poetic Corpus 10
2 Poetry in an Icelandic Environment 31
3 The Authenticity Question 51
4 Strategies of Poetic Communication 77
5 Subjects of Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders 98
6 A Suitable Literary Style 134
7 New Emphases in Late Sagas of Icelanders 157
8 Sagas without Poetry 178

Conclusion 197

Glossary of Old Norse Terms 201
Bibliography 205
Index 215

TABLES

1	Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders	22
2	Relative Size of Sagas of Icelanders	24
3	Sagas of Icelanders containing Poetry generally dated between 1200–50	25
4	Sagas of Icelanders containing Poetry generally dated between 1250–80	26
5	Sagas of Icelanders containing Poetry generally dated between 1280–1400 or later	27
6	Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders quoted in Old Icelandic non-saga Sources	29
7a	Encomia by Icelandic Skalds for Icelanders of the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries mentioned or cited in Sagas of Icelanders and/or other Icelandic Texts	45
7b	Encomia for Foreign Dignitaries of the Tenth–Eleventh Centuries mentioned/recorded only in Sagas of Icelanders	47
7c	Other long Poems named, cited or partially cited in Sagas of Icelanders	49
8	Sagas of Icelanders without Poetry	196

The tables are placed at the end of the chapters in which they fall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been living with the subject of skaldic poetry in Old Norse literature for a long time. During the last twenty years or so the project *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* has been my constant intellectual companion, while the last five years, from 2017 to the present, have been spent working, together with colleagues, on the edition of poetry in sagas of Icelanders that comprises Volume V in this series. It therefore seemed natural to try and articulate the various ways in which poetry in these sagas works within the saga texts as wholes and that is what I have attempted to do in this book. Needless to say, I have depended on the work of many others in this enterprise, most of them my fellow editors of the poetry in Volume V.

I am grateful to all with whom I have collaborated in this long-running project, but particularly to the General Editors of the series, Kari Ellen Gade, Guðrún Nordal, Edith Marold, Diana Whaley, Tarrin Wills and Hannah Burrows, as well as to Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir, all of whom have shared ideas and interpretations of the poetry discussed here. I would like to single out Kari Ellen Gade for special mention, not only for her unparalleled knowledge of skaldic poetry in all its dimensions, but also because she read the whole manuscript at my request and offered many helpful suggestions for improvement along with a number of corrections that should not have been there. I am also grateful to Lars Lönnroth for his comments on an earlier version of the first three chapters. I would also like to give special thanks to my son, Alfred Hiatt, who read the whole manuscript and suggested several improvements to its argument and style, all of which I have implemented. Any remaining deficiencies are of course my own responsibility.

SIGLA FOR POETRY CITED IN THIS BOOK

1. Poetry from Volumes I–IV, VI–VIII of *SkP*

Anon *Bárðdr* 1[IV] (*Ldn* 23)	Vol. IV. Anonymous, *stef* of *Bárðardrápa* [*Drápa* for Bárðr Hallason]
Anon (*FoGT*)[III]	Vol. III. Anonymous Stanzas from the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*
Anon *Hafg* 2[IV] (*Ldn* 5)	Vol. IV. Anonymous, *Hafgerðingadrápa* [*Drápa* of the Ocean Fences]
Anon *Krm*[VIII]	Vol. VIII. Anonymous, *Krákumál* [Speeches of the Crow]
Anon (*Ldn*) 4[IV] (*Ldn* 20)	Vol. IV. Anonymous, *Lausavísur* from *Landnámabók*
Anon *Lil*[VII]	Vol. VII. Anonymous, *Lilja* [Lily]
Anon *Mhkv*[III]	Vol. III. Anonymous, *Málsháttakvæði* [Proverb Poem]
Anon *Nkt*[II]	Vol. II. Anonymous, *Nóregs konungatal* [Enumeration of the Kings of Norway]
Anon *Pl*[VII]	Vol. VII. Anonymous, *Plácitusdrápa* [*Drápa* about Plácitus]
Arn *Herm*[III]	Vol. III. Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *Poem about Hermundr Illugason*
Arn *Þorfdr*[II]	Vol. II. Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *Þorfinnsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Þorfinnr]
Bjbp *Jóms*[I]	Vol. I. Bjarni byskup Kolbeinsson, *Jómsvíkingadrápa* [*Drápa* about the Jómsvíkingar]
Bragi *Rdr*[III]	Vol. III. Bragi inn gamli [the Old] Boddason, *Ragnarsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Ragnarr]

Eil *Þdr*III	Vol. III. Eilífr Goðrúnarson, *Þórsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Þórr]
ESk LvII	Vol. II. Einarr Skúlason, *Lausavísur*
Eskál *Vell*I	Vol. I. Einarr skálaglamm [Tinkle-scales] *Vellekla* [Lack of Gold]
Eyv *Hál*I	Vol. I. Eyvindr skáldaspillir [Plagiarist, Destroyer of Poets] Finnsson, *Háleygjatal* [Enumeration of the Háleygir (People of Hálogaland)]
Eyv LvI	Vol. I. Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, *Lausavísur*
Eþver LvI	Vol. I. Einarr þveræingr [from Þverá] Eyjólfsson, *Lausavísa*
GSvert *Hrafndr*IV	Vol. IV. Guðmundr Svertingsson, *Hrafnsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson]
GunnLeif *Merl I–II*VIII	Vol. VIII. Gunnlaugr Leifsson, *Merlínuspá I–II* [The Prophecies of Merlin]
Hallv *Knútdr*III	Vol. III. Hallvarðr háreksblesi, *Knútsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Knútr (the Great)]
HaukrV *Ísldr*IV	Vol. IV. Haukr Valdísarson, *Íslendingadrápa* [*Drápa* about Icelanders]
Hharð LvII	Vol. II. Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson, *Lausavísur*
Ket 1–2VIII	Vol. VIII. *Ketils saga hængs* [The Saga of Ketill Salmon], Brúni Lv 1, Keth Lv 1
KormǪ Lv 65III	Vol. III. Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, *Lausavísur* (preserved in *TGT* only)
Máni LvII	Vol. II. Máni, *Lausavísur*
OBarr Frag 1–2III	Vol. III. Ormr Barreyjarskáld, Fragments
Ormr *Woman*III	Vol. III. Ormr Steinþórsson, *Poem about a woman*
Ótt *Hfl*I	Vol. I. Óttarr svarti [the Black], *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head-ransom]
Run Öl 1VI	Vol. VI. 2. Viking Age 15. Öland, 1 – Karlevi stone
Run U Fv1912; 8VI	Vol. VI. 2. Viking Age 12. Uppland, 41 – Sigtuna box
RvHbreiðm *Hl*III	Vol. III. Rǫgnvaldr jarl and Hallr Þórarinsson, *Háttalykill inn forni* [The Old Key to Verse-forms]

Sigv *Ást*[I]	Vol. I. Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Poem about Queen Ástríðr*
Sigv *Austv*[I]	Vol. I. Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austfararvísur* [Verses on a Journey to the East]
SnH Lv[II]	Vol. II. Sneglu-Halli, *Lausavísur*
SnSt *Ht*[III]	Vol. III. Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal* [Enumeration of Verse-forms]
Sturl *Hrafn*[II]	Vol. II. Sturla Þórðarson, *Hrafnsmál* [Raven's Speech]
ÚlfrU *Húsdr*[III]	Vol. III. Úlfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa* [House-*drápa*]
VSt *Erf*[III]	Vol. III. Vǫlu-Steinn, *Ǫgmundardrápa* [*Drápa* about Ǫgmundr]
Þjsk Lv1b[IV] (*Ldn* 21)	Vol. IV. Þorleifr jarlsskáld [Jarl's poet] Rauðfeldarson, Lausavísa 1b, *Lausavísur*
Þjóð *Yt*[I]	Vol. I. Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Ynglingatal* [Enumeration of the Ynglingar]
ÞKolb *Eirdr*[I]	Vol. I. Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *Eiríksdrápa* [*Drápa* about Eiríkr]
Þmáhl *Máv* 9a[IV]	Vol. IV, Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr Þórólfsson, *Máhlíðingavísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlið] (*Máv*), st. 9a
Þorm Lv[I]	Vol. I. Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, *Lausavísur*
ÞormÓl *Ár*[IV]	Vol. IV. Þormóðr Óláfsson, *Dróttkvætt poem about Árón Hjǫrleifsson*
ÞormÓl *Árhryn*[IV]	Vol. IV. Þormóðr Óláfsson, *Hrynhent poem about Árón Hjǫrleifsson*
Þul *Hafrs*[III]	Vol. III. Anonymous *Þulur* 36. *Hafrs heiti* [Names for Goat]
Þul *Kvenna II*[III]	Vol. III. Anonymous *Þulur* 55. *Kvenna heiti ókend* [Woman-names lacking a determinant]
Þul *Orma*[III]	Vol. III. Anonymous *Þulur* 48. *Orma heiti* [Names for Serpents]
Þþyn Lv 1[IV] (*Ldn* 10)	Vol. IV. Þorbjǫrn þyna, Lausavísa 1, *Lausavísur*
Ǫrv[VIII]	Vol. VIII. *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* [The saga of Arrow-Oddr]

2. Poetry from Volume V, Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders

[listed alphabetically by saga and, within each saga grouping, alphabetically by character and by stanza number]

Band	*Bandamanna saga [The Saga of the Confederates]*
Ófeigr Lv	Ófeigr Skíðason, *Lausavísur*
Band 1	Ófeigr Lv 1
Band 3	Ófeigr Lv 3
Band 4	Ófeigr Lv 4
Band 5	Ófeigr Lv 5
Bárð	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss [The Saga of Bárðr, Deity of Snæfell]*
HelgaB Lv	Helga Bárðardóttir, *Lausavísur*
Bárð 1	HelgaB Lv 1
Bárð 2	HelgaB Lv 2
Hetta Lv	Hetta, *Lausavísur*
Bárð 3–4	Hetta Lv 1–2
Bárð 6	= Anon (*Ldn*) 4^{IV} (see Section 1 above)
Bergb	*Bergbúa þáttr [Þáttr about a Mountain Dweller]*
Bergb 1–12	Hallmundr, *Hallmundarkviða* [Poem about Hallmundr]
BjH	*Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa [The Saga of Bjǫrn, Champion of the People of Hítardalur]*
BjHít Lv	Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi Arngeirsson, *Lausavísur*
BjH 2	BjHít Lv 2
BjH 3	BjHít Lv 3
BjH 5	BjHít Lv 4
BjH 6	BjHít Lv 5
BjH 8	BjHít Lv 6

BjH 9	BjHít Lv 7
BjH 10	BjHít Lv 8
BjH 11	BjHít Lv 9
BjH 15	BjHít Lv 11
BjH 16	BjHít Lv 12
BjH 18	BjHít Lv 14
BjH 20	BjHít Lv 15
BjH 21	BjHít Lv 16
BjH 24	BjHít Lv 17
BjH 25	BjHí Lv 18
BjH 26–8	BjHít *Grám* 1–3, Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi *Grámagaflím* [Grey-belly libel]
BjH 30	BjHít Lv 20
BjH 32	BjHít Lv 21
BjH 34	BjHít Lv 22
ÞKolb Lv	Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *Lausavísur*
BjH 4	ÞKolb Lv 1
BjH 7	ÞKolb Lv 2
BjH 14	ÞKolb Lv 4
BjH 19	ÞKolb Lv 5
BjH 22	ÞKolb Lv 6
BjH 23	ÞKolb Lv 7
BjH 33	ÞKolb Lv 9
BjH 38	ÞKolb Lv 11

Dpl	*Droplaugarsona saga [The Saga of the Sons of Droplaug]*
GDrop Lv	Grímr Droplaugarson, *Lausavísur*
Dpl 2	GDrop Lv 1
Dpl 3	GDrop Lv 2
HÁsbi Lv	Helgi Ásbjarnarson, *Lausavísa*
Dpl 1	HÁsbi Lv 1

Eb	*Eyrbyggja saga [The Saga of the People of Eyrr]*
Bbreiðv Lv	Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson, *Lausavísur*
Eb 24–5, 27–31	Bbreiðv, *Lausavísa* 1–7
Halli Lv	Halli berserkr, *Lausavísa*
Eb 21	Halli Lv 1
Leiknir Lv	Leiknir berserkr, *Lausavísa*
Eb 22	Leiknir Lv 1
Oddr breiðfirðingr (Obreið)	
Eb 1–2	Obreið, *Illugadrápa* [*Drápa* for Illugi] (*Illdr*) 1–2
Eb 3–19	Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr Þórólfsson (Þmáhl)
	Þmáhl, *Máhlíðingavísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlíð] (*Máv*) 1–17
Þormóðr Trefilsson (ÞTref)	
Eb 20, 26, 33–5	ÞTref, *Hrafnsmál* [Raven's Speech] (*Hrafn*) 1–5
Styr Lv	Arngrímr Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson, *Lausavísa*
Eb 23	Styr Lv 1

Eg	*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar [The Saga of Egill, son of Skallagrímr]*
Ármóðsd Lv	Ármóðr's daughter, *Lausavísa*
Eg 66	Ármóðsd Lv 1
Egill Lv	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Lausavísur*
Eg 8	Egill Lv 4
Eg 9	Egill Lv 5
Eg 10	Egill Lv 6
Eg 12	Egill Lv 8
Eg 16	Egill Lv 11
Eg 17	Egill Lv 12
Eg 18	Egill Lv 13
Eg 19	Egill Lv 14
Eg 20	Egill Lv 15
Eg 23	Egill Lv 16
Eg 28	Egill Lv 21

Eg 29	Egill Lv 22
Eg 32	Egill Lv 25
Eg 56	Egill Lv 27
Eg 57	Egill Lv 28
Eg 58	Egill Lv 29
Eg 59	Egill Lv 30
Eg 60	Egill Lv 31
Eg 61	Egill Lv 32
Eg 62	Egill Lv 33
Eg 63	Egill Lv 34
Eg 64	Egill Lv 35
Eg 65	Egill Lv 36
Eg 67	Egill Lv 37
Eg 68	Egill Lv 38
Eg 69	Egill Lv 39
Eg 70	Egill Lv 40
Eg 71	Egill Lv 41
Eg 122	Egill Lv 42
Eg 123	Egill Lv 43
Eg 127	Egill Lv 44
Eg 129	Egill Lv 45
Eg 130	Egill Lv 46
Eg 131	Egill Lv 47
Eg 132	Egill Lv 48
Egill *Aðdr* (*Eg*)	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Aðalsteinsdrápa* [*Drápa* for Aðalsteinn]
Eg 21–2	Egill *Aðdr* 1–2
Egill *Arkv*	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Arinbjarnarkviða* [Poem about Arinbjǫrn] (*Arkv*)
Eg 97–121	Egill *Arkv* 1–25
Eg 104	Egill *Arkv* 8
Eg 111	Egill *Arkv* 15
Eg 112	Egill *Arkv* 16
Eg 113	Egill *Arkv* 17
Eg 120	Egill *Arkv* 24

Eg 121	Egill *Arkv* 25
Egill *Berdr*	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Berudrápa* [*Drápa* about a Shield]
Eg 128	Egill *Berdr* 1
Egill *Hfl*	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head-ransom]
Eg 34–54	Egill *Hfl* 1–21
Eg 34	Egill *Hfl* 1
Eg 35	Egill *Hfl* 2
Eg 44	Egill *Hfl* 11
Eg 45	Egill *Hfl* 12
Eg 48	Egill *Hfl* 15
Eg 50	Egill *Hfl* 17
Egill *Skjalddr*	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Skjaldardrápa* [*Drápa* about a Shield]
Eg 126	Egill *Skjalddr* 1
Egill *St*	Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons]
Eg 72–96	Egill *St* 1–25
Eg 94	Egill *St* 23
Eg 95	Egill *St* 24
Eskál Lv	Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, *Lausavísur*
Eg 124	Eskál Lv 1b
Eg 125b	Eskál Lv 2b
Kveld Lv	Kveldúlfr Bjálfason, *Lausavísa*
Eg 1	Kveld Lv 1
Skall Lv	Skallagrímr Kveldúlfsson, *Lausavísur*
Eg 2	Skall Lv 1
Eir	*Eiríks saga rauða [The Saga of Eiríkr the Red]*
Þórhv Lv	Þórhallr veiðimaðr [Hunter], *Lausavísur*
Eir 1	Þórhv Lv 1
Eir 2	Þórhv Lv 2

Fbr	*Fóstbrœðra saga [The Saga of the Sworn Brothers]*
Fbr 1	= *Gr* 41
Fbr 22	Anon (*Fbr*) 1
Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld (Þorm)	
Fbr 2–7, 10–18	from Þorm, *Þorgeirsdrápa* [*Drápa* for Þorgeirr Hávarsson] (*Þorgdr*) 1–6, 7–15
Þorm Lv	Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, *Lausavísur*
Fbr 8	Þorm Lv 1
Fbr 9	Þorm Lv 2
Fbr 21	Þorm Lv 4
Fbr 23	Þorm Lv 5
Fbr 24	Þorm Lv 6
Fbr 26	Þorm Lv 8
Fbr 27	Þorm Lv 9

Gísl	*Gísla saga Súrssonar [The Saga of Gísli Súrsson]*
GSúrs Lv	Gísli Súrsson, *Lausavísur*
Gísl 6	GSúrs Lv 4
Gísl 7	GSúrs Lv 5
Gísl 10	GSúrs Lv 7
Gísl 11	GSúrs Lv 8
Gísl 12	GSúrs Lv 9
Gísl 15	GSúrs Lv 12
Gísl 16	GSúrs Lv 13
Gísl 17	GSúrs Lv 14
Gísl 18	GSúrs Lv 15
Gísl 19	GSúrs Lv 16
Gísl 20	GSúrs Lv 17
Gísl 21	GSúrs Lv 18
Gísl 22	GSúrs Lv 19
Gísl 23	GSúrs Lv 20
Gísl 24	GSúrs Lv 21
Gísl 25	GSúrs Lv 22

Gísl 26	GSúrs Lv 23
Gísl 27	GSúrs Lv 24
Gísl 28	GSúrs Lv 25
Gísl 29	GSúrs Lv 26
Gísl 30	GSúrs Lv 27
Gísl 31	GSúrs Lv 28
Gísl 32	GSúrs Lv 29
Gísl 33	GSúrs Lv 30
Gísl 34	GSúrs Lv 31
Gísl 35	GSúrs Lv 32
Gísl 36	GSúrs Lv 33
Gísl 37	GSúrs Lv 34
Gísl 38	GSúrs Lv 35
Gísl 40	GSúrs Lv 37
ÞSúrs Lv	Þorkell Súrsson, *Lausavísa*
Gísl 3	ÞSúrs Lv 1

Glúm	*Víga-Glúms saga [The Saga of Killer-Glúmr]*
Brúsi Lv	Brúsi Hallason, *Lausavísur*
Glúm 10	Brúsi Lv 1
Eþver Lv	Einarr þveræingr Eyjólfsson, *Lausavísur*
Glúm 11	Eþver Lv 2
VGl Lv	Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson, *Lausavísur*
Glúm 1	VGl Lv 1
Glúm 3	VGl Lv 3 (= *Reykd* 1)
Glúm 5	VGl Lv 5
Glúm 6	VGl Lv 6
Glúm 7	VGl Lv 7
Glúm 8	VGl Lv 8
Glúm 9	VGl Lv 9
Glúm 12	VGl Lv 10
Glúm 13	VGl Lv 11

Gr	*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar [The Saga of Grettir Ásmundarson]*
Ásd Lv	Ásdís Bárðardóttir, *Lausavísa*
Gr 72	Ásd Lv 1
Ásmh Lv	Ásmundr hærulangr [Grey locks], *Lausavísa*
Gr 10	Ásmh Lv 1
Grett Lv	Grettir Ásmundarson, *Lausavísur*
Gr 8	Grett Lv 1
Gr 9	Grett Lv 2
Gr 11	Grett Lv 3
Gr 12	Grett Lv 4
Gr 14	Grett Lv 6
Gr 17	Grett Lv 8
Gr 18	Grett Lv 9
Gr 26	Grett Lv 13
Gr 27	Grett Lv 14
Gr 29	Grett Lv 16
Gr 30	Grett Lv 17
Gr 38	Grett Lv 21
Gr 45	Grett Lv 22
Gr 57–8	Grett Lv 25–6 (= *Ldn* 26–7^{IV})
Gr 60	Grett Lv 28
Gr 61	Grett Lv 29
Gr 63	Grett Lv 31
Gr 66–70	Grett Lv 34–8
Gr 22–4	Grett, *Ævkv I*, Grettir, *Ævikviða I*, 1–3
Gr 31–7	Grettir Ásmundarson and Sveinn á Bakka, *Sǫðulkolluvísur* [Saddle-head verses]
Gr 39–42	Grett, *Ævkv II*, Grettir, *Ævikviða II*, 1–4 (*Gr* 41 = *Fbr* 1)
Gr 46–7	Grett *Hallfl* 1–2, Grettir, *Hallmundarflokkr* [*Flokkr* about Hallmundr]
HallmGr Lv	Hallmundr, *Lausavísur*
Gr 43	HallmGr Lv 1

HallmGr *Hallkv*	Hallmundr, *Hallmundarkviða* [Poem of Hallmundr]
Gr 51–6	HallmGr, *Hallkv* 1–6
QnÓf Lv	Qnundr Ófeigsson, *Lausavísur*
Gr 1	QnÓf Lv 1
Gr 4	QnÓf Lv 2
Gunnl	*Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu [The Saga of Gunnlaugr Serpent-tongue]*
Gunnl 23	Anon (*Gunnl)* 1
Gunnl 24	Anon (*Gunnl*) 2
Gunnll Lv	Gunnlaugr ormstunga, *Lausavísur*
Gunnl 13	Gunnll Lv 8
Gunnl 16	Gunnll Lv 10
Gunnl 19	Gunnll Lv 12
Gunnl 3	Gunnll *Aðdr* 1, from Gunnlaugr ormstunga, *Aðalráðsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Aðalráðr]
Gunnl 6–8	Gunnll *Sigdr* 3, 1, 2, from Gunnlaugr ormstunga, *Sigtryggsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Sigtryggr silkiskegg]
HrafnQ Lv	Hrafn Qnundarson, *Lausavísur*
Gunnl 12	HrafnQ Lv 1
Gunnl 15	HrafnQ Lv 2
Gunnl 20	(= *Korm* 3)
Þórðr Kolbeinsson (ÞKolb), *Gunnlaugs drápa ormstungu* (*Gunndr*)	
Gunnl 21	ÞKolb *Gunndr* 1
Hallfr	*Hallfreðar saga [The Saga of Hallfreðr]*
Hallfr 1	Anon (Hallfr) 1(= *Vatn* 1)
Gríss, Lv	Gríss Sæmingsson, *Lausavísa*
Hallfr 25	Gríss Lv 1
Hfr Lv	Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld [Troublesome poet] Óttarsson, *Lausavísur*
Hallfr 2	Hfr Lv 1
Hallfr 4	Hfr Lv 3

Hallfr 9	Hfr Lv 6
Hallfr 10	Hfr Lv 7
Hallfr 11	Hfr Lv 8
Hallfr 12	Hfr Lv 9
Hallfr 13	Hfr Lv 10
Hallfr 14	Hfr Lv 11
Hallfr 15	Hfr Lv 12
Hallfr 16	Hfr Lv 13
Hallfr 17	Hfr Lv 14
Hallfr 18–24	Hfr Lv 15–21, possibly = Hfr, *Gríssvísur*
Hallfr 26	Hfr Lv 22
Hallfr 31	Hfr *Eirdr* 1, from Hallfreðr, *Eiríksdrápa* [*Drápa* about Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson]

Harð	*Harðar saga Grímkelssonar [The Saga of Hǫrðr, son of Grímkell]*
Grímk Lv	Grímkell Bjarnarson, *Lausavísur*
Harð 3	Grímk Lv 1
Harð 4	Grímk Lv 2
HǫrðG Lv	Hǫrðr Grímkelsson, *Lausavísur*
Harð 9	HǫrðG Lv 3
Harð 11	HǫrðG Lv 4
Harð 12	HǫrðG Lv 5
Harð 14	HǫrðG Lv 7
Harð 15	HǫrðG Lv 8
Harð 16	HǫrðG Lv 9
Harð 17	HǫrðG Lv 10
Sóti Lv	Sóti *Lausavísur*
Harð 8	Sóti Lv 1
Harð 10	Sóti Lv 2
SignV Lv	Signý Valbrandsdóttir, *Lausavísur*
Harð 2	SignV Lv 1
TorfiV Lv	Torfi Valbrandsson, *Lausavísa*
Harð 1	TorfiV Lv 1
Þorb Lv	Þorbjǫrg Grímkelsdóttir, *Lausavísur*

Harð 6	Þorb Lv 1
Harð 18	Þorb Lv 2
Háv	*Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings [The Saga of Hávarðr from Ísafjörður]*
Háv 4	Þþyn Lv 1^{IV} (*Ldn* 10) (see Section 1 above)
Hávh Lv	Hávarðr halti [the Lame], *Lausavísur*
Háv 5	Hávh Lv 4
Háv 7	Hávh Lv 6
Háv 8	Hávh Lv 7
Háv 9–12	Hávh Lv 8–11
Háv 13	Hávh Lv 12
Háv 14	Hávh Lv 13
Háv 15	Hávh Lv 14
Heið	*Heiðarvíga saga [The Saga of the Heath-slayings]*
Eviðs Lv	Eiríkr viðsjá [the Wary], *Lausavísur*
Heið 4, 10–12, 15–17	Eviðs Lv 1–7
Gestr Lv	Gestr Þorhallsson, Lausavísur
Heið 1–2	Gestr Lv 1–2
GÞorg Lv	Gísli Þorgautsson, *Lausavísa*
Heið 9	GÞorg Lv 1
Tindr Lv	Tindr Hallkelsson, *Lausavísur*
Heið 13–14	Tindr Lv 1–2
ÞBrún Lv	Þorbjǫrn Brúnason, *Lausavísur*
Heið 5	ÞBrún Lv 1
Heið 6	ÞBrún Lv 2
Heið 7	ÞBrún Lv 3
Heið 8	ÞBrún Lv 4
Þuríðr Lv	Þuríðr Óláfsdóttir pá, *Lausavísur*
Heið 3	Þuríðr Lv 1

Korm	*Kormáks saga Ǫgmundarsonar [The Saga of Kormákr Ǫgmundarson]*
Korm 64	Anon (*Korm*) 1
HólmgB Lv	Hólmgǫngu [Duelling]-Bersi Véleifsson, *Lausavísur*
Korm 28	HólmgB Lv 2
Korm 37	HólmgB Lv 4a
Korm 40	HólmgB Lv 6
Korm 41	HólmgB Lv 7
Korm 44	HólmgB Lv 9
Korm 45	HólmgB Lv 4b
Korm 43	HólmgB Lv 9
Korm 46	HólmgB Lv 10
Korm 48	HólmgB Lv 12 (= *Laxd* 1)
Korm 50	HólmgB Lv 14
KormǪ Lv	Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, *Lausavísur*
Korm 1	KormǪ Lv 1
Korm 2	KormǪ Lv 2
Korm 3	KormǪ Lv 3
Korm 4	KormǪ Lv 4
Korm 5	KormǪ Lv 5
Korm 6	KormǪ Lv 6
Korm 7	KormǪ Lv 7
Korm 8	KormǪ Lv 8
Korm 9	KormǪ Lv 9
Korm 10	KormǪ Lv 10
Korm 14	KormǪ Lv 13
Korm 19	KormǪ Lv 18
Korm 20	KormǪ Lv 19
Korm 22	KormǪ Lv 20
Korm 26	KormǪ Lv 24
Korm 29–32	KormǪ Lv 25–28
Korm 34–5	KormǪ Lv 30–31
Korm 51	KormǪ Lv 32
Korm 52	KormǪ Lv 33a

Korm 57	KormQ Lv 38
Korm 59	KormQ Lv 40
Korm 60	KormQ Lv 41
Korm 61	KormQ Lv 42
Korm 62	KormQ Lv 43
Korm 63	KormQ Lv 44
Korm 65	KormQ Lv 33b
Korm 70	KormQ Lv 50
Korm 76	KormQ Lv 55
Korm 77	KormQ Lv 56
Korm 78	KormQ Lv 57
Korm 79	KormQ Lv 58
Korm 80	KormQ Lv 59
Korm 82	KormQ Lv 61
Korm 83	KormQ Lv 62
Korm 84	KormQ Lv 63
Korm 85	KormQ Lv 64
KormQ Lv 65III	in *TGT* (see Section 1 above)
Steing Lv	Steingerðr Þorkelsdóttir, *Lausavísa*
Korm 21	Steing Lv 1

Krók	*Króka-Refs saga [The Saga of Sly Refr]*
KrRef Lv	Króka-Refr, *Lausavísur*
Krók 3	KrRef Lv 3

Laxd	*Laxdœla saga [The Saga of the Laxdœlir]*
Laxd 1	= HólmgB Lv 12 (*Korm* 48)
Laxd 4	Anon (*Laxd* 1)
Laxd 5	Anon (*Laxd* 2)
Auðr Lv	Auðr, *Lausavísa*
Laxd 2	Auðr Lv 1
ÞorgHǫll Lv	Þorgils Hǫlluson, *Lausavísa*
Laxd 3	ÞorgHǫll Lv 1

Nj	*Njáls saga [The Saga of Njáll]*
Nj 46	Anon (*Nj*) 2
Nj 53–63	Anon *Darr* I–II, Anonymous, *Darraðarljóð* [The Song of Dǫrruðr or The Song of the Pennant]
GunnHám Lv	Gunnarr Hámundarson, *Lausavísur*
Nj 26 (Add 24)	GunnHám Lv 13
Kári Lv	Kári Sǫlmundarson, *Lausavísur*
Nj 50	Kári Lv 5
Sigmund Lv	Sigmundr Lambason, *Lausavísur*
Nj 15–17 (Add 13–15)	Sigmund Lv 1–3
Steinunn Lv	Steinunn Refs (Dálks)dóttir, *Lausavísur*
Nj 40–1	Steinunn Lv 2–1
Unnr Lv	Unnr Marðardóttir, *Lausavísur*
Nj 1–3 (Add 1–3)	Unnr Lv 1–3
Þelf Lv	Þormóðr elfaraskáld, *Lausavísa*
Nj 27	Þelf Lv 1
Þórh Kv	Þórhildr skáldkona [Poetess], *Kviðlingr*
Nj 12	Þórh Kv 1
ÞormÓl Lv	Þormóðr Óláfsson, *Lausavísa*
Nj 28 (Add 25)	ÞormÓl Lv 1
StjǫrnODr	*Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr [The Dream of Star-Oddi Helgason]*
StjǫrnODr 1–5	StjOdd *Geirfl*, Stjǫrnu-Oddi, *Geirviðarflokkr* [*Flokkr* about Geirviðr]
StjǫrnODr 6–16	StjOdd *Geirdr*, Stjǫrnu-Oddi, *Geirviðardrápa* [*Drápa* about Geirviðr]
Svarfd	*Svarfdœla saga [The Saga of the People of Svarfaðardalur]*
Þjsk Lv	Þorleifr jarlsskáld Rauðfeldarson, *Lausavísur*
Svarfd 5	Þjsk Lv 1a (see also Section 1 under Þjsk)
Svarfd 10	Þjsk Lv 3
Svarfd 11	Þjsk Lv 4
Karl Lv	Karl inn rauði [the Red], *Lausavísur*

Svarfd 12	Karl Lv 2
Svarfd 14	Karl Lv 3
Klaufi Lv	Klaufi Snækollsson, *Lausavísur*
Svarfd 13	Klaufi Lv 7
Vígl	*Víglundar saga [The Saga of Víglundr]*
Ketilr Lv	Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir, *Lausavísur*
Vígl 2	Ketilr Lv 1
Vígl 8	Ketilr Lv 2
Vígl 13	Ketilr Lv 3
Ólǫf Lv	Ólǫf Þórisdóttir
Vígl 1	Ólǫf Lv 1
Trausti Lv	Trausti Þorgrímsson, *Lausavísur*
Vígl 15	Trausti Lv 1
Vígl 16	Trausti Lv 2
VíglÞ Lv	Víglundr Þorgrímsson, *Lausavísur*
Vígl 4	VíglÞ Lv 2
Vígl 5	VíglÞ Lv 3
Vígl 7	VíglÞ Lv 5
Vígl 11	VíglÞ Lv 8
Vígl 14	VíglÞ Lv 10
Vígl 20	VíglÞ Lv 12
Vígl 21	VíglÞ Lv 13
Vígl 22	VíglÞ Lv 14
Vígl 24	VíglÞ Lv 16
ÞórðVígl Lv	Þórðr bóndi, *Lausavísa*
Vígl 19	ÞórðVígl Lv 1
Þórð	*Þórðar saga hreðu [The Saga of Þórðr the Quarrelsome]*
Þórðh Lv	Þórðr hreða, *Lausavísur*
Þórðh 7	Þórðh Lv 7
Þórðh 8	Þórðh Lv 8
Þórðh 9	Þórðh Lv 9

ÞSHDr	*Anonymous, Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*
Anon (*ÞSHDr*)	Anonymous stanzas from *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallsonar*
Anon (*ÞSHDr*) 1–3	

ABBREVIATIONS

AM	Refers to manuscripts in the Arnamagnæan Collection in both Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, and Copenhagen, Den arnamagnæanske samling, Nordisk forskningsinstitut, University of Copenhagen. Example: AM 132 fol designates the compilation Möðruvallabók 'The Book of Möðruvellir' (abbreviated M)
ANG	Noreen, Adolf, *Altnordische Grammatik I. Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik* (*Laut- und Flexionslehre*). 4th edn (Halle, 1923)
FoGT	*The Fourth Grammatical Treatise*
FoGT 2014	Clunies Ross, Margaret and Jonas Wellendorf (eds), *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise* (University College London, 2014)
GKS	Den gamle kongelige samling (The Old Royal Manuscript Collection), Royal Library Copenhagen
ÍF	Íslenzk Fornrit. Publications of *Hið íslenzka fornritafélag* 'The Old Icelandic Text Society', Reykjavík, Iceland. The following volumes, containing edited texts of sagas of Icelanders, are cited in this book by volume number, chapter number (if relevant) and page number(s). All texts of sagas of Icelanders and *Landnámabók* are cited from these editions:
ÍF 1	Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*. *ÍF* 1 (Reykjavík, 1968)
ÍF 2	Sigurður Nordal (ed.), *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. *ÍF* 2 (Reykjavík, 1933)

ÍF 3	Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (eds), *Borgfirðinga saga*. *ÍF* 3 (Reykjavík, 1938) [contains *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Heiðarvíga saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*]
ÍF 4	Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (eds), *Eyrbyggja saga*. *ÍF* 4 (Reykjavík, 1935) [also contains *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grœnlendinga saga*]
ÍF 5	Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Laxdœla saga*. *ÍF* 5 (Reykjavík, 1934)
ÍF 6	Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (eds), *Vestfirðinga sögur*. *ÍF* 6 (Reykjavík, 1943) [contains *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*]
ÍF 7	Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. *ÍF* 7 (Reykjavík, 1936 [also contains *Bandamanna saga*]
ÍF 8	Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Vatnsdœla saga*. *ÍF* 8 (Reykjavík, 1939) [also contains *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*]
ÍF 9	Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.), *Eyfirðinga sǫgur*. *ÍF* 9 (Reykjavík, 1956) [contains *Svarfdœla saga*, *Valla-Ljóts saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*]
ÍF 10	Björn Sigfússon (ed.), *Ljósvetninga saga með þáttum*. *ÍF* 10 (Reykjavík, 1940) [also contains *Reykdœla saga*]
ÍF 11	Jón Jóhannesson (ed.), *Austfirðinga sǫgur*. *ÍF* 11 (Reykjavík, 1950) [contains *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Fljótsdœla saga*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*]
ÍF 12	Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls saga*. *ÍF* 12 (Reykjavík, 1954)
ÍF 13	Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds), *Harðar saga*. *ÍF* 13 (Reykjavík, 1991) [also contains *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Bergbúa þáttr*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Kumblbúa þáttr*, *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, *Þorskfirðinga saga*]
ÍF 14	Jóhannes Halldórsson (ed.), *Kjalnesinga saga*.

	ÍF 14 (Reykjavík, 1959) [also contains *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Víglundar saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu*]
ÍF 24	Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson (eds), *Morkinskinna II*. *ÍF* 24 (Reykjavík, 2011)
ÍF 26	Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I*. *ÍF* 26 (Reykjavík, 1941)
ÍF 30	Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.), *Sverris saga*. *ÍF* 30 (Reykjavík, 2007)

English versions of all sagas of Icelanders are individually available in various translations. A complete set of English translations is available in Viðar Hreinsson *et al*. (eds), *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*. 5 vols (Reykjavík, 1997). The translations of sagas offered in this book are my own.

LaufE	Laufás *Edda*
LaufE 1979	Faulkes, Anthony (ed.), *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, Volume I. *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar* (Reykjavík, 1979)
Ldn 1921	Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Landnámabók. Melabók AM 106. 112 fol* (Copenhagen and Kristiania [Oslo], 1921)
LP	Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen, 1931). Repr. Copenhagen, Atlas Bogtryk, 1966. Cited as *LP*: followed by italicised lemma.
Meissner	Meissner, Rudolf, *Die Kenningar der Skalden. Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. (Bonn etc., 1921). Repr. Hildesheim etc., Olms, 1984. Cited as *Meissner* followed by relevant page number(s).
NK	All references to the texts of eddic poetry in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (GKS 2365 4to) and related manuscripts are to the following edition, abbreviated *NK* and followed by the page reference(s): Neckel, Gustav, rev. Hans Kuhn (eds), *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 2 vols I. Text. 5th edn (Heidelberg, 1983)

OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn online, accessed on various occasions at www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au
ONP	*Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* https://onp.ku.dk/
Skj **A**/**B**	Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. Vols AI, AII (tekst efter håndskrifterne) and BI, BII (rettet tekst) (Copenhagen, 1912–15), repr. Copenhagen, 1967 (A) and 1973 (B).

All skaldic poetry is cited from published or forthcoming editions of *SkP*, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. Clunies Ross *et al*. (2007–) unless otherwise specified.

SkP	Clunies Ross, Margaret, Kari Ellen Gade, Edith Marold, Guðrún Nordal, Diana Whaley and Tarrin Wills (eds), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, 9 vols (Turnhout, 2007–).

The following volumes have been published and are also available in electronic format on the project's web site https://skaldic.org/.

SkP I	Whaley, Diana (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas I*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2012)
SkP II	Gade, Kari Ellen (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas II*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2009)
SkP III	Gade, Kari Ellen with Edith Marold (eds), *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2017)
SkP VII	Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2007)
SkP VIII	Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.), *Poetry in fornaldarsögur*, 2 vols (Turnhout, 2017)

The following volumes are forthcoming:

SkP IV	Guðrún Nordal and Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir (eds), *Poetry on Icelandic History*

SkP V	Clunies Ross, Margaret, Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin Wills (eds), *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*
SkP VI	Marold, Edith, Vivian Busch and Jana Krüger (eds), *Runic Poetry*
SkP IX	Burrows, Hannah (ed.), *Bibliography and Indices*.

Sigla for poetry in SkP are of two kinds, full and abbreviated. The abbreviated sigla apply only to poetry in Volumes V and VIII, Poetry in sagas of Icelanders and Poetry in fornaldarsögur.

Full sigla comprise:

(a) reference to abbreviated poet name or Anon

(b) short title of poem or Lv (*lausavísa*):

(c) stanza number(s) and line number(s)

(d) superscript roman numeral denoting volume number of *SkP* in which the stanza/poem appears

Example: The first stanza of Einarr skálaglamm 'Tinkle-scales' Helgason's *Vellekla* 'Lack of Gold' is designated Eskál *Vell* 1[I]. The superscript numeral indicates that the poem is published in Volume I of *SkP*.

Abbreviated sigla for poetry in Vols V and VIII comprise:

(a) short title of saga (e.g. *Eg* for *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*)

(b) stanza number (numbered sequentially in the whole saga): and line number(s).

Example: *Eg* 10/1 is the abbreviated siglum for Egill Lv 6/1 (*Eg* 10), i.e. the first line of Egill Skalla-Grímsson's sixth *lausavísa*, but the tenth stanza in the saga overall.

In this book abbreviated sigla are generally used to refer to poetry in Volume V, but full sigla are occasionally given when the additional information is important to the discussion; e.g. the full siglum Egill *St* 1 (*Eg* 72) indicates that this stanza is the first of Egill's long poem *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons] but the seventy-second in the saga as a whole.

Note that in this book the superscript volume number ([V]) is not shown when reference is made to poetry in Volume V, *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*.

References to poetry in all other volumes of *SkP* give the superscript volume number as part of the siglum.

For a reference list of the sigla used in this book, see Sigla for Poetry Cited in this Book on pp. x–xxviii

SnE = **Snorri Sturluson, *Edda* (c. 1225)**

Throughout this book, reference is made to the abbreviated titles of the following editions of the various parts of *SnE* by Anthony Faulkes:

SnE 2005	Faulkes, Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd edn (University College London, 2005)
SnE 1998	Faulkes, Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Skáldskaparmál*. Parts I–II. (University College London, 1998)
SnE 2007	Faulkes, Anthony (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Háttatal*. 2nd edn (University College London, 2007)
TGT	*The Third Grammatical Treatise*
TGT 1884	Ólsen, Björn Magnússon (ed.), *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlingers prolog og to andre tillæg*. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 12 (Copenhagen, 1884)

Abbreviations for Sagas of Icelanders and other commonly cited texts

Bandamanna saga	*Band*
Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss	*Bárð*
Bergbúa þáttr	*Bergb*
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	*BjH*
Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar	*ÞSHDr*
Droplaugarsona saga	*Dpl*
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar	*Eg*
Eiríks saga rauða	*Eir*
Eyrbyggja saga	*Eb*

Finnboga saga ramma	*Finnb*
Fljótsdœla saga	*Flj*
Flóamanna saga	*Flóam*
Fóstbrœðra saga	*Fbr*
Friðþjófs saga ins frœkna	*Frið*
Gísla saga Súrssonar	*Gísl*
Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar	*Gr*
Gull-Þóris saga	*Gullþ*
Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu	*Gunnl*
Gylfaginning	*Gylf*
Hallfreðar saga vandrœðaskálds	*Hallfr*
Harðar saga Grímkelssonar	*Harð*
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings	*Háv*
Heiðarvíga saga	*Heið*
Hrafnkels saga	*Hrafnk*
Hœnsa-Þóris saga	*Hœns*
Kjalnesinga saga	*Kjaln*
Kormáks saga Ǫgmundarsonar	*Korm*
Króka-Refs saga	*Krók*
Kumblbúa þáttr	*Kumbl*
Landnámabók	*Ldn*
Laxdœla saga	*Laxd*
Ljósvetninga saga	*Ljósv*
Njáls saga	*Nj*
Skáldskaparmál	*Skm*
Snorra Edda	*SnE* (see above)
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr	*StjǫrnODr*
Sturlunga saga	*Stu*
Svarfdœla saga	*Svarfd*
The First Grammatical Treatise	*FGT*
The Fourth Grammatical Treatise	*FoGT*
The Third Grammatical Treatise	*TGT*
Valla-Ljóts saga	*Vall*
Vatnsdœla saga	*Vatn*
Víga-Glúms saga	*Glúm*

Víglundar saga	*Vígl*
Þórðar saga hreðu	*Þórð*
Þorskfirðinga saga	see *Gull-Þóris saga*
Qrvar-Odds saga	*Qrv*

Abbreviated references to manuscripts mentioned in this book

M	AM 132 fol Möðruvallabók (M)
R	GKS 2367 4to Codex Regius of *Snorra Edda*
W	AM 242 fol Codex Wormianus
T^{x}	Ms. No. 1374, Utrecht, Codex Trajectinus
U	DG 11 4to, Codex Upsaliensis
A	AM 748 I a 4to
B	AM 757 a 4to
C	AM 748 II 4to
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A NOTE ON *HEITI* AND KENNINGS

Among the stylistic features of Old Norse skaldic poetry that are frequently mentioned in this book, especially in Chapter 6, are *heiti* and kennings (Old Norse *kenning*, pl. *kenningar*). *Heiti* are special poetic terms, not normally found in prose, for many of the noun subjects of skaldic poetry. They may be used in a decorative manner to vary a poet's references to a commonly cited subject; for example, the terms *fljóð*, *svanni* and *svarri* are all terms for 'woman' which are found only in poetry.

Kennings in their simplest form are two-part noun periphrases for commonly referenced poetic subjects, such as 'man', 'woman', 'warrior', 'sword' or 'ship', which substitute for that subject without explaining directly what it is. Audiences were expected to internalise the conventions that governed kenning formation and supply the referent of the kenning from their own knowledge bank. The interpretation of kennings thus depended on the audiences' memory of the conventional patterns by which this process of substitution took place. They would know, for example, that a kenning for 'man' or 'warrior' often used the pattern '(masculine) tree of a weapon' to designate a man, or 'assembly of weapons' to refer to a battle. In this book, as throughout the skaldic edition *SkP*, kenning referents are supplied in translations of poetry within square brackets and in upper case characters immediately after their constitutive periphrasis. For example, the woman-kenning *Hlín hringa* is glossed 'Hlín <goddess> of rings [WOMAN]', with the goddess-name Hlín explained in diamond brackets and the kenning referent in capitals.

Many kennings are composed of more than one referent, as in the example *Hrist brims lauka* 'the Hrist <goddess> of the surf of leeks [ALE > WOMAN]'. Here the sub-kenning for ale or strong drink flavoured with herbs, 'the surf of leeks', is glossed first and the left-to-right direction in which the whole kenning's interpretation should flow is indicated by a greater-than sign > before the main referent. Complex kennings can involve up to five sub-kennings, and are marked up in order from innermost to outermost referent, separated by >.

When kennings refer to specific persons, places or mythological beings the referent is identified in the translation in square brackets in lower case

after an equals sign = and a space; e.g. *bróðir Fróða* ‘the brother of Fróði [= Kormákr]’. If the kenning contains a mythological or legendary name, that name is glossed within <…> to indicate the class of being concerned, as in *Ilmr erma* ‘the Ilmr <goddess> of sleeves [WOMAN]’ and in the two other woman-kennings in the paragraphs above.

For further discussion, see the definitions of the terms *heiti* and *kenning* in *SkP* I (2012), 1, General Introduction, §§5.1 Kenning and 5.2 *Heiti*, pp. lxx–lxxxix.

INTRODUCTION

This book is not a search for the origins of the sub-genre of sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur* in Modern Icelandic), because it seems to me that those origins are likely to be diverse, complex and ultimately not fully knowable. Rather, it is an attempt to document the various adaptations of existing literary resources and the development of new ones that led to the emergence of written sagas of Icelanders, probably from the early thirteenth century. While the main focus of the study is upon the majority of sagas that employ the mixed prose and verse medium often termed *prosimetrum*, a final chapter analyses the group of nine sagas that do not contain any poetry and investigates the various reasons why their authors may have eschewed a mixed prosaic and poetic discourse in favour of prose alone.

Throughout this study the focus is upon the empirical evidence provided by the saga texts themselves for the different kinds of developments that writers of sagas of Icelanders followed as well as the routes some took that seem to have become dead ends. The study also looks at how the saga form changed over the 200 years or so (c. 1200–c. 1400) in which it was in active written composition and how the ways in which saga writers used poetry were also modified in response to a range of presumed cultural changes.

The book's concentration upon the poetry in these texts distinguishes it from most, if not all, existing literary studies on the general subject of the sagas of Icelanders. Most previous book-length studies effectively treat these sagas as prose works in which poetry sometimes appears and thus requires a brief discussion. Their authors usually devote a few pages to the poetry, but for the most part their emphasis is on literary aspects of the text as perceived through its prose, including its structure, plot, characterisation and style. There are some exceptions to this generalisation, especially involving studies of poets' sagas, where it is difficult to ignore the role of poetry, but it would be fair to say that the literary role and character of poetry in sagas of Icelanders has had short shrift in most previous works on the subject, excellent as many of them are. It is arguable that the failure to consider saga poetry as an integral part of sagas as whole literary works has partially distorted their modern reception, approximating them more closely to modern literary genres, such as the novel, than to medieval textual forms.

There are some obvious reasons for the relative paucity of literary treatments of the poetic component of sagas of Icelanders. The main one is that the poetry, mostly in the skaldic metre *dróttkvætt* [court poetry], is difficult in terms of syntax and vocabulary, making use of special synonyms (*heiti*) and abstruse circumlocutions (kennings) for its referents.[1] Unless one has a good knowledge of the thought patterns that underlie the kenning system, this poetry gets in the way of a reader's understanding of a saga narrative and the most characteristic readerly response of a modern person is to skate over the stanzas and move towards the next part of the prose text.

Some Essential Background Information

Skaldic poetry takes its name from the Old Norse word *skald* (later *skáld*), a term used to denote a certain kind of poet, principally one composing stanzas in the elaborate metre named *dróttkvætt*, which deployed a complex and ornate poetic diction.[2] By the end of the twelfth century skaldic poetry had flourished in Scandinavia, particularly in Norway and its colonies, Iceland, Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides, for at least three hundred years. For the most part, skalds had practised their art at the courts of Norwegian rulers, sometimes also composing for kings and men of high rank in other parts of Scandinavia and in the British Isles. The poetry they created was mostly encomiastic, sometimes admonitory, and its main purpose was to celebrate the lives, travels and military achievements of their patrons.[3] Thus skalds came to act as semi-official recorders of history *avant la lettre*,[4] at a time when written records were generally unavailable in Scandinavia. From some time in the twelfth century skaldic court poetry, which had previously

1 See the explanation and exemplification of these terms in *A Note on Heiti and Kennings* on pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

2 For a general introduction to Old Norse skaldic poetry, see Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005), Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry. The Dróttkvætt Stanza*. Islandica 42 (Ithaca and London, 1978), Klaus von See, *Skaldendichtung. Eine Einführung* (Munich and Zurich, 1980) and Hans Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt* (Heidelberg, 1983).

3 The large corpus of Old Norse skaldic poetry was edited in four volumes by Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 4 vols (Copenhagen, 1912–15) and is in process of being re-edited by Margaret Clunies Ross *et al.* (eds), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007–). Five volumes of this edition have so far been published. For information on the way in which skaldic poetry is cited in this book, see *Abbreviations* and *Sigla for Poetry cited in this book* on pp. x–xxxvi above.

4 As argued by Judith Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse: A Case of Literacy *avant la lettre*', in Pernille Hermann (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Scandinavia*. The Viking Collection 16 (Odense, 2005), pp. 187–210.

existed only in oral form except for a few runic inscriptions,[5] began to be incorporated into both Latin and vernacular prose biographies of these kings and jarls, and thus to be used as a witness from the past to support medieval historians' prose narratives.

Alongside the medium of skaldic poetry, with its elitist purposes and complex metre and diction, there also existed another poetic medium in Scandinavia which is generally referred to as eddic (or eddaic) poetry. Runic inscriptions in poetic form from the period before the Viking Age (c. 850–1050 AD), as well as eddic poetry's use of the common Germanic alliterative verse-form, indicate that this kind of poetry was a traditional inheritance of the Scandinavian peoples, which they shared with other speakers of Germanic languages, though it was adapted to their own distinctive linguistic environment. Appropriately to a traditional medium, eddic poetry is recorded as celebrating the mythic and legendary gods and heroes of the pre-Christian age, as well as more diverse subjects.[6]

It is generally accepted that the second half of the twelfth century and the early decades of the thirteenth saw the invention of new written literary forms in Iceland and, to some extent, in Norway, that involved the development of long prose narratives in the vernacular,[7] some of which incorporated poetry in either eddic or skaldic metres, or in both. The Old Norse term *saga* (plural s*ǫ*gur/*sögur*) came to be used to refer to these literary forms. Although some sagas contain no poetry, the majority do, with the exception of prose romances (*riddarasögur* [sagas of knights]), many of these translated from French or Anglo-Norman. The Latin term *prosimetrum*[8] has frequently been used in recent scholarship – and I have used it this way myself[9] – to refer to the mixed medium of prose and poetry in Old Norse-Icelandic sagas.

5 There are only two runic inscriptions from before the late twelfth century that show some elements of skaldic metrical form, the Karlevi stone (Run Öl 1^{VI}) from the Swedish island of Öland in the Baltic Sea and the copper box from Sigtuna (Run U Fv1912; 8^{VI}) in Uppland, Sweden.

6 For a discussion of eddic poetry, its subjects, style and metres, see Carolyne Larrington *et al.* (eds), *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry. Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 2016).

7 See Carol J. Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca and London, 1982) and Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North. The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik. The Viking Collection 13 (Odense, 2002), pp. 44–69.

8 Cf. *OED* 2nd edn online http://www-oed-com.ezproxy2.library.usyd.edu.au [accessed 26 October 2020], *prosimetrum*: 'A genre or style of literature in which the text is written partly in prose and partly in verse'.

9 For a general discussion of the *prosimetrum* in its various forms, see Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (eds), *Prosimetrum. Crosscultural Perspectives on*

However, there are often differences between the usage of Latin writers of *prosimetrum* and that of early Scandinavian authors writing in the vernacular. In many Latin texts the poetry and the prose are the work of the same author, whereas that is not necessarily the case in saga texts. In fact, more often than not, the narrative voice of the prose text ascribes the composition of the poetry to another author, usually a known skald or a character in the narrative. Sometimes it may be unattributed and presented as the voice of common opinion. Most often the poetry is treated as a witness from the past in terms of the narrative present of the saga narrative.[10] A second major difference between saga texts and Latin *prosimetra* lies in the lack of regularity in the citation of the poetry within the prose text. Rarely do prose and poetry alternate regularly within the text. There are wide variations both in the numbers of stanzas cited in a prose saga text and in their distribution. Sometimes they cluster within a chapter or episode of the narrative, sometimes they are sparsely distributed within large stretches of prose text.

From the beginning vernacular saga authors treated the poetry available to them with great discrimination. Even in the earliest saga texts it is obvious that the emergent generic distinctions between different kinds of prose writing required different kinds of poetic support. The most obvious distinction, which depended directly on the subject matter of skaldic encomia on the one hand and legendary poetry on the other, was the restriction of skaldic poetry about rulers to the emergent biographies of the kings of Norway and other Nordic realms and the use of existing or sometimes invented legendary poetry, predominantly in eddic metres, in the legendary sagas of ancient times (*fornaldarsögur*), such as *Vǫlsunga saga* [The Saga of the Vǫlsungar] or *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* [The Saga of Hervǫr and Heiðrekr]. The new edition of the major part of early Scandinavian poetry, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (*SkP*, 2007–), shows this distinction clearly by dividing the corpus into volumes based on the nature of the sources in which the poetry is preserved. The encomiastic poetry, arranged largely by poet and preserved in royal biographies and historical compilations, occupies Volumes I and II, while the poetry from *fornaldarsögur*, arranged by saga, occupies Volume VIII.

Among the various new sub-genres of the saga there were two that have a particularly Icelandic focus in terms of their subject matter. They go by the modern Icelandic names of *samtíðarsögur* [contemporary sagas] and

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Narrative in Prose and Verse (Cambridge, 1997) and Harris's chapter in that volume, 'The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and Some Relatives', pp. 131–64.

10 Cf. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 172–90.

Íslendingasögur [sagas of Icelanders], the latter often being called 'family sagas' in English. Whereas the contemporary sagas deal with narratives from the historical period in Iceland relatively close to the time in which they were first written, the thirteenth century, the sagas of Icelanders are set in the period of the settlement of the island (c. 870–930 AD) and the century immediately thereafter. This was two to three hundred years before the time of those people, most of whose identities we do not know, who actually compiled and wrote the sagas. Unlike the authors of *konungasögur* [kings' sagas], historical compilations and *fornaldarsögur*, the anonymous authors of sagas about Icelandic settlers, their ancestors and descendants did not have a ready supply of traditional heroic poetry or royal encomia to fall back on in order to provide a historical basis for their narratives and act as a bridge between past and present. However, the fact that skaldic rather than eddic poetry was chosen to form part of the *prosimetrum* of *Íslendingasögur* suggests that this type of saga was considered fundamentally as a kind of history[11] rather than a kind of legend, and to that extent there was an affinity, affirmed in their poetry, between sagas about Icelanders and historical works about the kings of Norway and other foreign rulers.[12]

While there have been many studies of the role of poetry, mainly of the skaldic variety, in sagas of Icelanders,[13] and to a lesser extent in contemporary sagas,[14] relatively little attention has been focused on the overall character of

11 History to a medieval Icelander must have had a somewhat elastic identity and certainly admitted elements of what would be defined by a modern reader as the supernatural and the fantastic. The question of whether the concept of fictionality existed when sagas of Icelanders first took shape is a complex issue, discussed further in Chapter 3.

12 Poetry in eddic metres, especially *fornyrðislag* [old story metre], does occur in sagas of Icelanders, particularly when their protagonists undertake adventures, like those of *fornaldarsaga* heroes, in distant lands or among supernatural adversaries. An example is the dialogue exchange in *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar* [The Saga of Hǫrðr Grímkelsson] (*Harð* 8–12) between the Icelandic hero Hǫrðr Grímkelsson and a revenant, once a viking, named Sóti, whose burial mound in Sweden he has broken into in search of treasure.

13 See, among many other works, Bjarni Einarsson, 'On the Role of Verse in Saga Literature', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 7 (1974), 118–25; Alois Wolf, 'Zur Rolle der *Vísur* in der altnordischen Prosa', in Osmund Menghin and Hermann M. Ölberg (eds), *Festschrift Leonhard C. Franz zum 70. Geburtstag*. Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft II (Innsbruck, 1965), pp. 459–84; Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 124–9; Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005).

14 On the latter, see particularly Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy. The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*

the poetry their authors used to support the prose texts of these sub-genres, or on the extent to which saga authors were able to choose their poetic sources, if there were any available, and their likely motives for doing so. Although there is no direct evidence about how saga writers decided on what kinds of poetry should be used for these sub-genres, how they accessed them and the range of what they had at their disposal, it is possible to infer their motives and practices from the available evidence.

Fundamental to the present inquiry is the presumption that those who initiated the new saga form, which took the lives of Icelanders themselves as its subject, had to develop models of a *prosimetrum* type that had no exact precedent, particularly because, unlike both kings' sagas and *fornaldarsögur*, there was no previously authorised body of poetry upon which to depend for the poetic element in the new saga form. This is not to say that vernacular poetry about Icelanders of the Settlement Age did not exist in oral tradition; the evidence of the corpus of poetry recorded in sagas of Icelanders and considered by modern experts to be authentic poetry of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, attests to that.[15] Rather, the development of the sagas of Icelanders required a certain sort of poetry to fit with the developing taste for literary interiority and the individual characterisation of the participants of saga narrative that is so typical of the sub-genre from its beginning. It is my argument here that it must have taken some time for saga authors to work out what existing poetry to select for their sagas, what not to use, what sometimes to invent or refashion and how to use it.

(Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001) and the forthcoming edition of poetry on Icelandic history in *SkP* IV, edited by Guðrún Nordal and Soffía Guðný Guðmundsdóttir. See also Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in Miðjumdalr. Zur Aktualität nordischer Heldendichtung im Island des 13. Jahrhunderts', in Heinrich Beck (ed.), *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im germanischen*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 2 (Berlin, 1988), pp. 183–96.

15 The question of the authenticity of skaldic poetry in *Íslendingasögur* continues to exercise scholars and there remain differing views on the subject. More recently metrical studies, such as by Kari Ellen Gade, 'The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 50–74 and Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'Kronologi i skaldekvæde. Distribusjon av metriske og språklege drag i høve til tradisjonell datering og attribuering' (PhD thesis, Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske studium, Universitet i Oslo, 2014) have developed a set of more rigorous criteria for establishing the age of stanzas, but it remains true that much skaldic poetry does not provide examples that would enable us to decide its age unequivocally. This subject is taken up again in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Many scholars have drawn attention to the fact that the skaldic poetry cited in kings' sagas and historical compilations is used, by and large, in a different fashion from the way poetry is used in sagas of Icelanders (and, to a large extent, in contemporary sagas).[16] There is, as Heather O'Donoghue put it, 'a fundamental distinction between verses which corroborate what is stated in the prose, so functioning as a footnote to the narrative, and those which, broadly speaking, ornament it – most often, by serving as the direct speech of the characters in the narrative …'.[17] Diana Whaley has expressed this difference as that between an 'authenticating' and a 'situational' mode of citation.[18] The authenticating mode in kings' sagas is a natural consequence of the authenticating function of skaldic encomia, which record the highlights of a ruler's life, and this mode is predominant in historical works, although the use of stanzas as integral parts of the narrative also occurs in them, more often than is sometimes acknowledged.[19]

It is important to recognise that skaldic poems were not normally quoted in their entirety within the prose texts of any sub-group of the Icelandic saga genre, including those that used them to authenticate their narratives. Most encomia in kings' sagas were, from the beginning, cited piecemeal or in small groups of stanzas. Modern editors have often reconstituted what they have assumed to be long poems (*drápur* or *flokkar*)[20] in their editions, but the poetry is rarely presented in this way in manuscripts.[21] Why did composers of the new *prosimetra* act in this way? In most cases it is unlikely to be because they knew only a few stanzas rather than whole poems. It rather seems plausible to presume that they were able to make use of a characteristic of the new written prose form that they did not have access to when poetry was transmitted only in an oral medium. That is the capacity of written prose to articulate an extended narrative, in which events and their protagonists are treated sequentially. When skalds declaimed their *drápur* or other compositions orally before their patrons they did not normally, as

16 Among the first to do so was Bjarni Einarsson, 'On the Role of Verse in Saga Literature'.

17 *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, p. 3.

18 Diana Whaley, 'Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*', in Alois Wolf (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson. Kolloquium anläßlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*. ScriptOralia 51 (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 245–66.

19 As O'Donoghue points out, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, pp. 10–77. See also Meulegracht Sørensen 'Verses as the Voice of the Past', pp. 182–3.

20 A *drápa* (plural *drápur*) is a long encomiastic skaldic poem with a refrain (*stef*), while a *flokkr* (plural *flokkar*) is a less formal long skaldic poem without a refrain.

21 For a discussion of the methodology adopted by modern editors of skaldic poetry faced with the fragmentary distribution of their material within prose texts see the General Introduction to *SkP* in *SkP* I (2012), pp. xxx–xxxv ('Editorial methodology') and pp. xxxix–xliv ('Reconstruction of skaldic poems').

far as is known, recite a few stanzas here and another small number there. A composer of a written text, on the other hand, could select at will the particular stanzas of a long poem he wished to cite in order to illustrate a specific event or action of his patron, and this piecemeal citation would not only provide a closer fit between verse and prose in terms of corroborating the prose writer's narrative with support from a voice of the past, but also render his *prosimetrum* more dramatic, because it allowed him to highlight important moments of his patron's life in a series of vignettes.[22] It is this new facility of the *prosimetrum*, as it appears in all the sub-genres of the Old Icelandic saga, that was arguably of greatest usefulness to the authors of sagas of Icelanders, who developed it in new ways during the course of that sub-genre's lifetime.

Within the corpus of skaldic poetry attributed to court skalds, both Norwegian and Icelandic, a more personal register existed side by side with their more formal compositions. It can be found in certain kinds of longer poems and informal, reflective *lausavísur* [free-standing stanzas, literally 'loose verses'] that were recorded in historical compilations, many employing a first-person narrative frame. Examples from the period before c. 1035 include the Icelander Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* [Verses on a Journey to the East] (Sigv *Austv*[1]), in which many of the stanzas have a comic, self-deprecating focus on the poet himself or give graphic descriptions of things and people he saw on his travels.[23] Some of Sigvatr's *lausavísur*, as well as those of his slightly earlier Norwegian contemporary Eyvindr skáldaspillir [Plagiarist *or* Destroyer of Poets] Finnsson (c. 915–90) are also in this personal, situational mode, a type that appears to have been cultivated in Iceland and other Norwegian colonies during the period before the end of the twelfth century. An expert Orcadian practitioner of the personalised *lausavísa* was Rǫgnvaldr jarl Kali Kolsson (d. 1158 or 1159), whose output of thirty-two *lausavísur* is very much in this mode.[24]

The comparative frequency of poetry in situational mode within sagas of Icelanders and in some contemporary sagas can be considered an innovation of the genre, but it does not necessarily follow that this resource was the only

22 Another characteristic of skaldic poetry, particularly in *dróttkvætt* metre, that would have enhanced its quotability in small chunks, is the fact that each four-line *helmingr* or half-stanza of an eight-line stanza is frequently syntactically self-contained, thus making for ease of citation. This point in discussed further in Chapter 4.

23 See R. D. Fulk's edition in *SkP* I (2012), 2, pp. 578–614; cf. also the evaluation by Kurt Schier, 'Austrfararvísur', in Wolfgang von Einsiedel (ed.), *Kindlers Literaturlexikon*. 8 vols (Zürich, 1965), I, pp. 1147–8.

24 Rǫgnvaldr's *lausavísur* have been edited by Judith Jesch in *SkP* II (2009), 2, pp. 575–609.

one available to these saga writers. In the following chapters evidence will be forthcoming to show that poetry in authenticating mode about eminent Icelanders who are the subjects of family sagas was available for use by saga writers but was not actually incorporated into their texts or was used only to a very limited extent. The choice of poetry selected to be incorporated into sagas of Icelanders is likely to have been a deliberate one, and it is also likely to have been based on the evolving requirements of literary composition in the new saga form. It is reasonable to assume that the character of the prose text evolved in close accord with the nature of the poetry selected for the saga *prosimetrum*, and this hypothesis can be supported by empirical evidence provided by the saga texts themselves and by cognate sources such as *Landnámabók* [The Book of Settlements]. Clearly the poetry also required certain stylistic adaptations to the new prose medium in which it came to be preserved and these are discussed in Chapter 6. It is also clear that the literary and aesthetic tastes of saga writers and their audiences changed, as one might expect, over the period between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. The character of the poetry we find in late sagas of Icelanders is therefore appreciably different from that incorporated into sagas generally judged to have been composed before 1250–80. It is also apparent that, in some circles, saga writers eschewed the use of poetry altogether, whether because no suitable poetry existed to support their narratives, or because the subject matter was judged unsuitable to poetry, or as a deliberate avoidance of certain kinds of evidence. This issue is the subject of Chapter 8.

I

The Poetic Corpus

Identifying and Dating the Sagas of Icelanders

In 1958 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson published an essay entitled *Dating the Icelandic Sagas*: *An Essay in Method*, in which he highlighted the difficulties of establishing a watertight chronology for the sub-genre of sagas of Icelanders. That problem remains with us, in spite of much recent research that has clarified some of the relationships between individual members of the sub-genre.[1] Recent and ongoing studies have also shown how many sagas have undergone revisions or are likely to have had sections added or removed, so that it often becomes difficult to speak of the age of a particular saga in absolute terms. The same applies to the poetry that forms part of the fabric of the majority of the *Íslendingasögur*: where it is possible to date the poetry contained in a saga, it sometimes seems to be of varying age, or to be confined to particular sections of the text which may be older or younger than the rest. Nevertheless most saga scholars have been able to reach a broad consensus on the identity of the individual sagas that constitute the sub-genre and on the relative chronology of its members.[2]

1 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Dating the Icelandic Sagas*, trans. G. Turville-Petre. Viking Society Text Series 3 (University College London, 1958). See further Vésteinn Ólason, 'Family Sagas', in Rory McTurk (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA, Oxford and Carlton, Victoria, 2005), pp. 101–18, especially pp. 114–15; *idem*, *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew Wawn (Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 17–19; Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 52–71 and Massimiliano Bampi, 'Genre', in Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (eds), *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* (London, 2017), pp. 4–14.

2 A certain scepticism about the possibility of ever achieving consensus on the classification and dating of sagas of Icelanders quite properly remains; see Örnólfur Thorsson, 'Leitin að landinu fagra: Hugleiðing um rannsóknir á

The question of the membership of the sub-genre, that is, which saga belongs to the *Íslendingasögur* and which to other sub-genres, like kings' sagas, *samtíðarsögur*, *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, is taken as read for the purpose of the argument of this book. That is, I accept the general consensus that there are approximately forty sagas that belong to the sub-genre of the *Íslendingasögur*, give or take a number of *þættir* [short tales] that are sometimes included in the count and sometimes excluded. (They are largely excluded here unless they contain poetry.) What is pertinent to this study is the relationship between prose narrative and its accompanying poetry in terms both of the sub-genre's development as a whole and in terms of the kinds of poetry chosen for its *prosimetrum*. It traces the ongoing history of the saga *prosimetrum* from that favoured in early sagas to the poetic material chosen for sagas of Icelanders from the later Middle Ages, arguing for developments within the sub-genre that have not previously been recognised by saga scholars.

Some Statistics

Table 1 (**Tables 1–5** are located at the end of this chapter) divides the sub-genre of *Íslendingasögur* into four groups based on the number of stanzas contained in each saga. This is arguably a crude measure, though it becomes meaningful when combined with other criteria. Reviewed in this way, it can be clearly seen that, based on the quantity of poetry quoted within each saga, there are four groups of sagas of Icelanders: those with no poetry (nine sagas, Group 4), those with between one and six stanzas (twelve sagas, Group 3), those with between seven and twenty-four stanzas (nine sagas, Group 2) and those with twenty-five or more stanzas (ten sagas, Group 1).

An important variable which has not been factored in so far is the absolute length of each saga; obviously those in Group 1 are mostly among the longest of sagas of Icelanders, when prose and poetry are counted together, although several of the poets' sagas are quite short, having relatively little prose content. **Table 2** provides a list of the relative size of the sagas of Icelanders, generated by Tarrin Wills using data from Málföng's saga corpus <www.málföng.is>, and showing the number of stanzas for each saga from the skaldic database <https://skaldic.org/db.php> (the same stanza may appear more than once).

Tables 3 to 5 now divide the *Íslendingasögur* that contain poetry (with those that do not noted in square brackets) into three groups based on a rough consensus view of the likely dates of the sagas concerned and annotate each entry with brief

íslenskum fornbókmenntum', *Skáldskaparmál*, 1 (1990), 28–53 and Ármann Jakobsson and Yoav Tirosh, 'The "Decline of Realism" and inefficacious Old Norse Literary Genres and Sub-Genres', *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies*, 3 (2020), 102–38.

comments (to be developed in later chapters) on the probable age of the poetry within them. Cases where there has been significant disagreement between scholars on the likely age of individual sagas are also noted. Not all scholars have agreed on all these datings, but the list follows the current consensus.[3] The three Tables are divided into three broad time bands, 1200–50, 1250–80 and 1280–1400, and are arranged alphabetically within the bands.

The probable dates of the sagas as complete entities (prose and poetry) are given in the left-hand column, with comment on the date of the poetry in them in the right-hand column. Lack of comment indicates that the poetry (or most of it) is considered contemporary with the prose text.[4] The statement 'pre-1200' indicates that the poetry probably dates from before the saga was composed, though not necessarily from as early as the tenth or early eleventh centuries. Sagas containing stanzas said to have been composed by characters mentioned in *Skáldatal* [Enumeration of Skalds] as court poets are prefaced with an asterisk.[5] In all these cases, a generic differentiation is maintained between their court poetry, which is mostly recorded in kings' sagas, and the domestic stanzas with which they are attributed in *Íslendingasögur*, as discussed further below.

Distinguishing Features of the Poetry in Tables 1–5

Group 1 of **Table 1** includes only two sagas that are not either sagas of poets or of outlaws, namely *Njáls saga* [The Saga of Njáll], the longest of all sagas of Icelanders, and *Eyrbyggja saga* [The Saga of the People of Eyrr], a saga

3 Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 'Family Sagas', pp. 114–15, where dates proposed in the authoritative Íslenzk fornrit (*ÍF*) editions are given alongside dates proposed by other scholars, where these vary from *ÍF*.

4 Opinion on the dating of the poetry follows Kari Ellen Gade, 'The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 50–74 and Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'Kronologi i skaldekvæde. Distribusjon av metriske og språklege drag i høve til tradisjonell datering og attribuering' (PhD thesis, Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske studium, Universitetet i Oslo, 2014), as well as the recent estimates of editors of individual sagas in *SkP* V (forthcoming).

5 *Skáldatal* [Enumeration of Skalds] is an annotated list, in two versions, of the rulers of the Scandinavian royal houses together with the names of the various skalds who composed in their honour, beginning with legendary Danish and Swedish kings and continuing with Norwegian rulers from Haraldr hárfagri [Fine-hair] down to Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–63). The text of both versions is in Jón Sigurðsson *et al.* (eds), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Edda Snorronis Sturlaei*. 3 vols (Copenhagen, 1848–87), III, pp. 251–69.

of less than half its length but still among the ten longest sagas of Icelanders, as **Table 2** shows. The high number of stanzas in *Njáls saga* is produced by the inclusion in some manuscripts of thirty stanzas that were added after the saga was written, though not long afterwards.[6] This saga also contains the eleven-stanza *fornyrðislag* poem *Darraðarljóð* [Song of Dǫrruðr *or* Song of the Pennant] (Anon *Darr*) which is recorded nowhere else. If these items were excluded, the saga would fall within the range of Group 2, with twenty-three stanzas. *Eyrbyggja saga* is a special case, to be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. Its compiler shows an exceptional interest in several kinds of poetry, quotes it at considerable length and uses it for several different purposes.

As I have indicated elsewhere,[7] the structures of poets' and outlaws' sagas have much in common, including an emphasis upon the protagonist's troubled life-history. Once certain developments in the kind of poetry considered appropriate to the *Íslendingasaga* genre took effect (see Chapter 2 below), the use of poetry as a vehicle for the self-expression of socially isolated individuals, such as skalds and outlaws were often seen to be, would follow almost logically.

Information derived from **Tables 1** and **3–5** shows that there is a correlation between the absolute number of stanzas per saga and the likely age of the saga as a whole, considered as *prosimetrum*. By and large the earlier the saga in terms of its probable date, the more likely it is to include a large amount of poetry.[8] Frequently that poetry is not only considerable in quantity but diverse generically, that is, it includes kinds of poetry other than *lausavísur*. It is to be expected that sagas whose protagonists are poets, like *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, *Egils saga*, *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*, would contain a lot of poetry, and so it proves. Several of these poets also figure in kings' sagas and are credited there with the composition of poetry in honour of royal patrons. They, together with Egill Skalla-Grímsson, are also named in *Skáldatal,* an enumeration of mainly Scandinavian kings and jarls and their serving skalds. The sources hardly overlap, however, in terms of these poets' compositions: with the exception of *Egils saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, the royal encomia are largely confined

6 For details of the additional stanzas, see the Introduction to R. D. Fulk's edition of the poetry from *Njáls saga* in *SkP* V (forthcoming).

7 Clunies Ross, *Old Norse-Icelandic Saga*, pp. 134–5.

8 A similar point has been made by Joseph Harris, 'The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and Some Relatives', in Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (eds), *Prosimetrum: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 149. As already mentioned in connection with **Table 1,** *Njáls saga* is an obvious exception to this generalisation, as is *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* [The Saga of Grettir Ásmundarson], with seventy-three stanzas.

to royal biographies and historical or pedagogical compilations, the poetry about the skalds' lives in Iceland to their named sagas, usually in the form of *lausavísur*. This group of sagas is often considered as a separate sub-class of the *Íslendingasögur* and referred to as the *skáldasögur* 'poets' sagas'. Current assessments of the age of the poetry in *skáldasögur*, based on metrical and linguistic features, are largely favourable to the idea that much of this poetry existed before 1200 and may have been the composition of the skalds who appear as characters in these sagas.[9]

In addition to the poets' sagas, it is possible to identify another grouping of texts with comparable characteristics from the early period, 1200–50 (**Table 3**), comprising *Droplaugarsona saga* [The Saga of the Sons of Droplaug], *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga* {The Saga of the Heath-slayings] and *Víga-Glúms saga* [The Saga of Killer-Glúmr]. Although some of the poetry within this group is attributed to poets who are known from other sources (e.g. Þórarinn svarti [the Black] máhlíðingr [from Mávahlíð] Þórólfsson, Þormóðr Trefilsson, Oddr breiðfirðingr [from Breiðafjörður], Tindr Hallkelsson, Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson), they do not belong to the *skáldasögur* group and are not presented as involving themselves in the stereotyped love affairs and male rivalries of the *skáldasögur*. All these sagas have their focus on regional feuds and the poetry within them is about fights or personal vendettas in which the characters who speak the poetry are involved, either as fighters themselves (Grímr Droplaugarson, Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr, Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson), as spectators or recorders of the events documented (Oddr breiðfirðingr, Þormóðr Trefilsson) or in both capacities (Eiríkr viðsjá [the Wary], Tindr Hallkelsson). The fact that several of these poets are brought into the saga narratives as recorders or authenticators of events rather than as participants in the events themselves involves the saga authors using the authenticating mode of skaldic citation, which is more usually characteristic of Old Norse-Icelandic historical writing, as has been discussed in the Introduction.

The authenticating mode is clear in *Eyrbyggja saga*'s introduction of two stanzas (*Eb* 1–2) from an encomium named in the prose text as *Illugadrápa*, that is, a long poem with a refrain (*drápa*) in honour of the chieftain Illugi svarti [the Black] Hallkelsson. The prose introduces the two stanzas, one shortly after the other, with 'svá kvað Oddr skáld í Illugadrápu' [so spoke the poet Oddr in *Illugadrápa*] and 'svá segir Oddr í Illugadrápu' [so says Oddr in *Illugadrápa*].[10] Oddr was not himself involved in the dispute over a dowry treated in this part of the *drápa* except as its recorder. Similarly

9 This generalization would not apply to some of the poetry of Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi or Gunnlaugr ormstunga [Serpent's tongue]. See Gade, 'Dating and Attributions', pp. 71–4.

10 *ÍF* 4, pp. 31–2.

Eyrbyggja saga cites five stanzas (*Eb* 20, 26, 33–5) from the poem *Hrafnsmál* [Raven's Speech] by Þormóðr Trefilsson at various points in its narrative, all commemorative of the killings carried out or engineered by the chieftain Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson. Again Þormóðr was not himself involved in these events, except as their recorder.[11]

A second strategy of poetic citation evident from a number of the early sagas of Icelanders involves the probable breaking up of originally long poems into *lausavísur* which are then staged at intervals in the saga text and presented as being performed extempore in the course of a narrative action in which the poet-protagonist is involved. This is the case with the *Máhlíðingavísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlíð] (*Máv*), a set of stanzas (*Eb* 3–19) composed by Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson of Mávahlíð and presented in *Eyrbyggja saga* as a series of responses this peace-loving farmer makes to questions from men he hopes to recruit as his backers in a lawsuit against the powerful chieftain Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson. According to the saga, as Þórarinn visits these men one by one, they ask him for details of the fight in which he killed a certain Þorbjǫrn digri [the Stout], and his answer to this series of questions is presented in seventeen *lausavísur* interspersed with varying amounts of prose.

It has long been suspected that Þórarinn's stanzas were part of a single long poem, that was called *Máhlíðingarvísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlíð] (*Máv*), according to *Landnámabók*, which quotes one stanza from it.[12] As we discuss further in Chapter 2, several scholars have proposed that the practice of breaking up long poems into *lausavísur* was relatively common among authors or compilers of sagas of Icelanders, and the reasons why they may have done so will be reviewed there. Here it can be observed that the practice seems to have been used as an alternative to the authentication mode in several of the early sagas of Icelanders, including *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*, the latter of which many consider to be among the earliest sagas of Icelanders.[13] As with the *Máhlíðingavísur*, stanzas by two poets, Eiríkr viðsjá and Tindr Hallkelsson, who are presented as both participants in and recorders of the famous battle that took place in 1014, are introduced by a similar technique of question and answer to what we find used in Þórarinn's serial dialogues with his potential supporters. In the case of *Heiðarvíga saga*, Eiríkr commemorates the battle, in which he participated

11 A similar point has been made by Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 80–5.

12 *ÍF* 1, p. 115: 'Um þat orti Þórarinn Máhlíðingavísur, eptir því sem segir í Eyrbyggja sǫgu' [Þórarinn composed 'Stanzas about the people of Mávahlíð' about that, as it says in *Eyrbyggja* saga.] For a summary of views on the poem, see Kate Heslop, Introduction to the *Máhlíðingavísur* in *SkP* V (forthcoming).

13 See *ÍF* 3, pp. cxxxiv–cxxxix.

himself, in a series of stanzas (*Heið* 4, 10–12, 15–17) scattered through the saga text, three of which are presented as answers to questions posed by an unidentified man wanting to know how many men from both sides were killed there.[14] This transparent fiction probably conceals the saga writer's reliance on a long poem on the battle by Eiríkr, one stanza of which is also quoted in the fourteenth-century *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*.[15] Similarly, Tindr Hallkelsson is presented as reciting two *lausavísur*, one after another, in response to his brother Illugi's question of how many men had been at the battle: 'þá kvað Tindr vísu, er Illugi spurði, hvé margir þeir hefði verit' [then Tindr spoke a stanza when Illugi asked how many they had been].[16]

In Chapter 4 we will look further at the semiotic implications of the question-and-answer technique of poetic citation in sagas of Icelanders. Here its use to stage suspected long poems in sagas from the early period may suggest that this technique was adopted as a means of incorporating substantial poems into the fabric of the saga *prosimetrum* that were considered important but less prestigious than skaldic encomia in the form of *drápur* or *flokkar*.[17] It also allowed the saga writer to maintain a multivocal narrative in a way that the authenticating mode, with its focus on the deeds of famous men, usually in the form of praise-poetry, did not. In Chapter 2 we will address the question of why encomiastic poetry is so uncommon in sagas of Icelanders even though there is reason to think that it was available for their authors' use.

One further characteristic of poetry appearing in sagas of the earliest group (**Table 3**) in comparison with those of the middle and late periods (**Tables 4 and 5**) is that a relatively high proportion of it is cited in Icelandic sources outside the saga genre, in most cases in one or another version of *Landnámabók* or in one or another of the grammatical treatises, the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (c. 1225), and the *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises* (c. 1250 and 1340 respectively).[18] The absolute number of these citations is relatively small, but

14 *Heiðarvíga saga*, ch. 40, *ÍF* 3, pp. 322–3.

15 See Margaret Clunies Ross and Jonas Wellendorf (eds), *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise* (University College London, 2014), pp. 2–3, 52–3 and further *ÍF* 3, p. cxl. Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1991), pp. 182–94 puts forward the theory that Eiríkr's stanzas are from an original long poem.

16 *ÍF* 3, pp. 307–8.

17 See **Table 7 c** in Chapter 2 for a list of such poems from all periods mentioned or cited in sagas of Icelanders.

18 These works are discussed further in Chapter 2. For a description of the various versions of *Landnámabók* cf. *ÍF* 1, pp. l–liv; on the importance of the poetic citations from sagas of Icelanders in the grammatical treatises, see the Introduction to *SkP* III (2017), pp. lxxxvii–xci and Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Poetic Sources of the Old Icelandic Grammatical Treatises', in Marialuisa Caparrini *et*

the fact that they do exist provides testimony to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Icelanders' knowledge of and esteem for this poetry and acts as indirect evidence of the poetry's authenticity. The preponderance of early poetry in these cross-references in non-saga texts, largely of the period before 1300, is obviously in part a function of chronology, as it necessarily excludes most poetry from sagas composed after that date.

Table 6 sets out in alphabetical order of saga the names of those poets, appearing as characters in sagas of Icelanders, from whose works quotations appear in non-saga Icelandic sources.[19] Most of the citations in **Table 6** are from works of a historical or pedagogical nature. They are revealing because they confirm that Icelandic men of letters of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries held the works of tenth- and early eleventh-century poets in such esteem as to cite them as authorities for particular historical events, as in the various *Landnámabók* references, or for literary reasons, as exemplifying particular kenning types or Latinate rhetorical figures, as in the grammatical treatises. The dominance of Egill Skalla-Grímsson in the citation list is particularly striking, given the doubts of some modern authorities about the authenticity of some of his poetry.[20] To give just one example of the pedagogical use of citations from early skalds, the first two lines of Hallfreðr Óttarsson's Lv II (*Hallfr* I4) are cited by Óláfr Þórðarson in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* as an instance of the figure Polintethon, a rhetorical device employing the same word in more than one grammatical case. The word in question is *sverð* [sword], which King Óláfr Tryggvason had commanded the poet to produce in every line of a *dróttkvætt* stanza, or so the saga has it.[21]

In the middle period of saga composition, between 1250–80 (**Table 4**), only *Gísla saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga* stand out as approaching the copiousness of the first period. *Gunnlaugs saga* follows the established literary pattern of the *skáldasögur*, but serious doubt has been cast on the authenticity of many of the stanzas in this saga in view of their frequent echoing of lines (and once a whole stanza) from earlier poetry and a number of metrical and

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al. (eds), *La Letteratura di Istruzione nel Medioevo Germanico. Studi in Onore di Fabrizio D. Raschella*. Textes et Études du Moyen Age 87 (Barcelona and Rome, 2017), pp. 77–9.

19 This Table does not include words, phrases or longer sequences that appear to be literary imitations of particular poems or stanzas in later Icelandic works, such as, for example, Sturla Þórðarson's echoes of Þormóðr Trefilsson's *Hrafnsmál* [Raven's Speech] in his own poem of the same name (after 1264).

20 For a summary of earlier scholars' doubts, see *ÍF* 2, pp. v–xvi; also Jón Helgason, 'Hǫfuðlausnarhjal', in Bjarni Guðnason *et al*. (eds), *Einarsbók: Afmæliskveðja til Einars. Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969* (Reykjavík, 1969), pp. 156–76.

21 See *ÍF* 8, pp. 161–2.

syntactic irregularities.[22] Although there are no outlaw sagas to compare it with amongst the earliest sagas of Icelanders, the authenticity of at least some the poetry of *Gísla saga* has been challenged by many scholars,[23] while others, beginning with Finnur Jónsson,[24] have considered the stanzas authentically tenth-century. One recent metrical and linguistic study has suggested that approximately two thirds of the saga's stanzas are likely to be authentic, with the remainder composed either by the saga author or some other redactor in the mid-thirteenth century in order to render the prose narrative's presentation of Gísli's visions of the afterlife more compatible with Christian ideology.[25] Kari Ellen Gade, who has recently edited the poetry of *Gísla saga*, has concluded that several poets must have contributed stanzas to the saga text, but that none of the poetry is later than the end of the twelfth century, when judged on the basis of stable diagnostic features such as hiatus words and *a* : *ǫ* rhymes in even lines.[26]

Most of the other sagas of Icelanders probably datable to the mid-thirteenth century either contain no poetry or only a small number of stanzas, not all of which are in the *dróttkvætt* metre most commonly used for *lausavísur*. It is difficult to draw any conclusion from these sources about the status of the *prosimetrum* form at this time: most of them are relatively short works with protagonists like Hrafnkell and Hœnsa-Þórir who were not associated with the composition of poetry, to judge from references outside their sagas.[27] It

22 See Gade, 'Dating and Attribution', pp. 72–3.

23 For example, Gabriel Turville-Petre, 'Gísli Súrsson and his Poetry: Traditions and Influences', *Modern Language Review*, 39 (1944), 374–91, who considered the poetry most likely to be the work of a late twelfth-century poet. This article was reprinted in Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Nine Norse Studies* (University College London, 1972), pp. 118–53. See also Peter G. Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gísli and its Icelandic Background', in *The Saga of Gísli*, trans. George Johnston (London, 1963), pp. 93–134.

24 Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (Halle, 1903). Finnur was also of the view that the saga writer may have worked from a written source containing some at least of the stanzas, which then became the basis for parts of the *prosimetrum*, particularly the section containing Gísli's dream verses, and that this is signalled by the clause (*ÍF* 6, p. 115) 'Sjá er in síðasta vísa Gísla' [This is the last of Gísli's stanzas], placed straight after the last cited stanza of the saga.

25 This is the view of Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 119 (2020), 220–57.

26 On these criteria see the discussion in Chapter 3 below. Gade discusses her conclusions about the dating of *Gísla saga* in the Introduction to her edition in *SkP* V (forthcoming).

27 Hœnsa-Þórir is mentioned in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* [Book of the Icelanders] (*ÍF* 1, pp. 11–12), but strictly in connection with the burning of his opponent Blund-Ketill, while Hrafnkell is mentioned in *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* 1, p.

may be that there was no suitable poetry available to include in their sagas[28] and in *Eiríks saga rauða*, a text concerned with voyages of discovery in the North Atlantic and North America. It is also possible that the prosimetrical urge to combine poetry with prose in a more or less regular way had gone out of fashion in some quarters of Iceland in the mid-century.

This latter possibility is supported by the example of *Laxdœla saga*, which, after *Njáls saga*, is the second longest of all sagas of Icelanders (see **Table 2**). The author of *Laxdœla saga* is somewhat of an antiquarian, with an interest in the pre-Christian religion and the customs of the Icelandic Settlement Age. He also shows himself to be interested in older poetry, as he mentions some of it by name or by poet, but yet he refrains from citing anything other than scraps of verse, most of which were probably attracted to his saga from the now lost saga of Þorgils Hǫlluson.[29] Such restraint on the part of an author obviously interested in past traditions suggests a possibly deliberate turning away from poetry as a voice of that past in this middle period of the thirteenth century. Ironically, perhaps, this very period is often referred to as the classical era of Icelandic saga writing, yet that is certainly not the case for the prosimetrical form.

The latest medieval period of Icelandic saga writing (**Table 5**) tells a different story. Here we find a resurgence of prosimetrical activity in the sagas composed from about 1280 up to the end of the Middle Ages and possibly beyond. There is evidence that some sagas in this group (e.g. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* [The Saga of Bárðr, Deity of Snæfell], *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* [The Saga of Hávarðr from Ísaflörður] and *Svarfdœla saga* [The Saga of the People of Svarfaðardalur]) may have existed in earlier thirteenth-century

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299), but only in connection with the landslide and other events that befell him when he first migrated to Iceland.

28 From the evidence of the various geographical settings of the corpus of sagas of Icelanders it seems likely that regional traditions were also important factors in determining whether sagas included much or any poetry. *Hrafnkels saga* is set in eastern Iceland, a region that boasted relatively few sagas, a significant number of which (e.g. *Fljótsdœla saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*) contain no poetry. This subject is investigated more closely in Chapter 8.

29 This lost saga is mentioned by name in *Laxdœla saga*, ch. 67 (*ÍF* 5, p. 199). Three (*Laxd* 3–5) of the five scraps of verse cited in the saga come from the section dealing with Þorgils Hǫlluson. Lars Lönnroth has argued that one detail in a stanza attributed to Þorgils (ÞorgHǫll Lv 1/3 (*Laxd* 3)) may suggest that the poetry attests to an earlier version of the narrative of how the sons of Bolli Þorleiksson took revenge for his murder than what we find in the prose text of *Laxdœla saga*; see his 'The Saga of Thorgils Holluson', in Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini (eds), *News from Other Worlds. Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture in Honor of John F. Lindow* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 101–8 at pp. 104–5.

forms but were apparently reworked and amplified in the following century. Where they contain poetry, it usually seems to belong to the later period, and to date from the fourteenth century, although this is not always the case. The poetry in *Svarfdœla saga*, for example, may date from the thirteenth century, as may some of that in *Hávarðar saga*.[30] In many cases, however, the saga as a whole and the poetry within it are fourteenth-century compositions, and both poetry and prose may often have been composed by the same person. Examples where this is presumed by recent editors to have been the case are *Harðar saga*, *Króka-Refs saga* [The Saga of Sly Refr], *Víglundar saga* [The Saga of Víglundr] and *Þórðar saga hreðu* [The Saga of Þórðr the Quarrelsome].[31]

The situation of the two longest sagas in this group, *Grettis saga* and *Njáls saga*, is similar. While the date of *Grettis saga* has been estimated as anywhere between 1300 and 1400, it seems most likely to have been a product of the fourteenth century in the form that has come down to us, but to have had some earlier antecedents, with a small core of its poetry belonging to the early period, but with much of it demonstrably datable on linguistic, metrical or contextual grounds (or all of these) to no earlier than the beginning of the fourteenth century. The author(s) or redactor(s) of this saga evinced a keen interest in poetry and produced it in various genres, from *lausavísur* in *dróttkvætt* metre to long poems like the *Sǫðulkolluvísur* [Saddle-head Verses] to *ævikviður* [life-poems] in *kviðuháttr* [poem's form] metre, much in the style of contemporary *fornaldarsögur* such as *Qrvar-Odds saga*.[32]

The case of *Njáls saga* is also complex, but it shows the same tendency to amplify its *prosimetrum* as do many other late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas of Icelanders and *fornaldarsögur*.[33] In all these sagas the *prosimetrum* is enlarged by attributing stanzas to all the main characters, particularly at points of dramatic tension in the narrative, much like the use of the aria in nineteenth-century opera.[34] There is a small core of probably

30 See the Introductions to the forthcoming editions by Kari Ellen Gade (*Svarfd*) and Rolf Stavnem and Margaret Clunies Ross (*Háv*) in *SkP* V.

31 See the Introductions and Notes to these sagas by their respective editors in *SkP* V, Margaret Clunies Ross (*Harðar saga*), Kari Ellen Gade (*Króka-Refs saga*) and Klaus Johan Myrvoll (*Víglundar saga* and *Þórðar saga hreðu*).

32 On the genre of the *ævikviða* (sometimes termed *ævidrápa*), which is found mostly in *fornaldarsögur*, see the definition in the Introduction to *SkP* VIII (2017), I, pp. lxxxi–lxxxii.

33 For a preliminary discussion of the phenomenon of poetic amplification in fourteenth-century Icelandic poetry, see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Autographical Turn in Late Medieval Icelandic Poetry', in Klaus Müller-Wille *et al.* (eds), *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften. Vänbok till Jürg Glauser* (Tübingen, 2017), pp. 150–4.

34 This comparison has been made with stanzas assigned to *fornaldarsögur* heroes

traditional stanzas, including those cited in the chapters (100–5) on the conversion to Christianity, which are shared with sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and *Kristni saga*, as well as the *fornyrðislag* poem *Darraðarljóð*, associated with the narrative of the Battle of Clontarf in Ireland, which took place in 1014. This core may be largely pre-1200 in origin, with the latest editor of the poetry, R. D. Fulk, suggesting that *Darraðarljóð* might well be a genuine early eleventh-century composition. In all twenty-three stanzas, including six shared with the conversion material, are probably original to the saga as completed c.1280, while there are thirty additional stanzas added later, but not very much later, to some manuscripts of the saga.[35]

Where it is possible to detect dating features in the poetry found in late sagas of Icelanders, the diagnosis often indicates composition from about the same period as the prose texts themselves or that poetry, probably of earlier date, is cited in a way that indicates that it may have been misunderstood or misplaced by the saga writer. It is common in the late sagas to find metrical irregularities or breaches of metrical rules, together with a mix of more than one verse-form, like *dróttkvætt* mixed with *hrynhent* [flowing rhymed], as in some stanzas of *Harðar saga*, and the presence of late linguistic forms confirmed by rhyme, awkward syntax and kenning constructions of an unconventional kind. There are some similarities in these last respects between the poetry of late *Íslendingasögur* and that of the increasingly popular *rímur* genre.[36]

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by Lars Lönnroth in 'Hjálmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry', *Speculum*, 46 (1971), 1–20 (at p. 7), repr. with postscript in Lönnroth, *The Academy of Odin. Selected papers on Old Norse literature* (Odense, 2011), pp. 191–218 and cf. the Introduction to *SkP* VIII (2017), 1, p. xc. The comparison is also valid for much of the poetry assigned to characters in late sagas of Icelanders, when due regard has been paid to the constraints of skaldic metre and diction.

35 See Fulk's Introduction to his edition of the stanzas from *Njáls saga* in *SkP* V for further detail on the late stanzas and the manuscripts in which they occur.

36 The uses of poetry in the group of late sagas listed in **Table 5** are the subject of separate analysis in Chapter 7.

Table 1. Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders (in descending number of stanzas)

Saga Title	No. of Stanzas	Comment
Group 1		
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (*Eg*)	132	includes 3 long poems
Kormáks saga (*Korm*)	85	includes 2 repeat stanzas
Grettissaga Ásmundarsonar (*Gr*)	73	excludes *Grettisfœrsla*
Njáls saga (*Nj*)	64	includes 4 in *Kristni saga*
Fóstbrœðra saga (*Fbr*)	40	includes 10 found elsewhere
Gísla saga Súrssonar (*Gísl*)	40	includes 2 found elsewhere
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa (*BjH*)	39	includes 1 attributed elsewhere to Kormákr
Eyrbyggja saga (*Eb*)	37	
Hallfreðar saga (*Hallfr*)	34	
Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu (*Gunnl*)	25	
Group 2		
Víglundar saga (*Vígl*)	24	
Harðar saga (*Harð*)	19	
Heiðarvíga saga (*Heið*)	17+	more in lost part of saga
Svarfdœla saga (*Svarfd*)	17	includes one in *Ldn*
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr (*StjǫrnODr*)	16	
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings (*Háv*)	15	
Víga-Glúms saga (*Glúm*)	13	
Þórðar saga hreðu (*Þórð*)	12	
Bergbúa þáttr (*Bergb*)	12	
Group 3		
Bandamanna saga (*Band*)	6	
Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (*Bárð*)	6	*Bárð* 6 = Anon *Ldn* 4[IV]
Droplaugarsona saga (*Dpl*)	6	
Laxdœla saga (*Laxd*)	5	*Laxd* 1 also = *Korm* 48
Draumr Þórsteins Síðu-Hallssonar (*ÞSHDr*)	3	

(continued)

TABLE 1—CONCLUDED

Eiríks saga rauða (*Eir*)	3	
Flóamanna saga (*Flóam*)	3	includes 2 found elsewhere
Króka-Refs saga (*Krók*)	3	
Kumblbúa þáttr (*Kumbl*)	2	
Grœnlendinga saga (*Grœn*)	1	= Anon *Hafg* 2[IV]
Reykdœla saga (*Reykd*)	1	= *Glúm* 3
Vatnsdœla saga (*Vatn*)	1	= *Hallfr* 1
Group 4		
The following nine sagas of Icelanders contain no poetry: *Finnboga saga ramma* (*Finnb*), *Fljótsdœla saga* (*Flj*), *Hrafnkels saga* (*Hrafnk*), *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* (*Hœns*), *Kjalnesinga saga* (*Kjaln*), *Ljósvetninga saga* (*Ljósv*), *Valla-Ljóts saga* (*Vall*), *Vápnfirðinga saga* (*Vápnf*) and *Þorskfirðinga saga* or *Gull-Þóris saga* (*Gullþ*).		

Note: The list of saga titles in this Table is followed by the abbreviated title used in the *SkP* edition. Titles of named poems are also followed by their abbreviated title upon first mention. The numbers in the Table include all stanzas that are cited in the saga in question, even if they were probably borrowed from or repeated in another source. This is not true of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* [The Saga of Egill Skalla-Grímsson] (*Eg*), however, as only the first stanza of *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons] (*St*) is cited in Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol (M)), the base manuscript of the A-version of the saga, while *Arinbjarnarkviða* [Poem for Arinbjǫrn] (*Arkv*) does not occur within the saga text in any medieval manuscript but was written on a verso leaf right after the end of the saga text in M. If these three long poems, *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head ransom] (*Hfl*), *St* and *Arkv*, were excluded from the count, the total number of stanzas for *Eg* would be reduced to sixty-one. The count also excludes poetry attributed to those protagonists of sagas of Icelanders (e.g. Hallfreðr Óttarsson, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson) which appears only in other sources, such as kings' saga compilations. Excluded from this Table is also the single extant *lausavísa* from *Þorsteins þáttr Austfirðings* (*ÞorstAust*), which is included in *SkP* V, but would have been more appropriately published in *SkP* II.

Table 2. Relative Size of Sagas of Icelanders in descending order of overall length compared with Number of Stanzas each contains

Saga	Words	Sts
Njáls saga	98940	64
Laxdœla saga	62448	5
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar	62243	133
Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar	61208	73
Gísla saga Súrssonar	42422	40
Eyrbyggja saga	38391	37
Ljósvetninga saga	35062	0
Fóstbrœðra saga	31553	42
Vatnsdœla saga	29291	1
Fljótsdœla saga	27281	0
Finnboga saga ramma	23705	0
Reykdœla saga	23683	1
Flóamanna saga	22426	3
Harðar saga	19863	19
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	19291	39
Svarfdœla saga	19206	17
Víga-Glúms saga	19119	13
Þórðar saga hreðu	15550	12
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings	15405	15
Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss	13153	6
Heiðarvíga saga	12983	18
Víglundar saga	11827	24
Króka-Refs saga	11086	3
Kormáks saga	10305	85
Hallfreðar saga	9703	34
Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu	9599	25
Vápnfirðinga saga	9598	0
Droplaugarsona saga	9412	6
Hœnsa-Þóris saga	8700	0
Bandamanna saga	8000	6
Eiríks saga rauða	7827	3
Valla-Ljóts saga	6923	0
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr	4561	16
Kumblbúa þáttr	285	2

Table 3. Sagas of Icelanders containing poetry generally dated between 1200–50

Saga	Date	Comment
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	c. 1215–30	doubt re authenticity of some stanzas
Droplaugarsona saga	c. 1200–40	poetry pre-1200; perhaps misplaced in prose text
**Egils saga Skallgrímssonar*	1220–30	most poetry pre-1200, some later; long poems probably had independent existence in C13th-14th
Eyrbyggja saga	1220–60 (?)	poetry very diverse; most from before 1200, some probably later
**Fóstbrœðra saga*	c.1200/1250–1300	poetry (Þormóðr) pre-1200, probably provides basis for saga
[*Grœnlendinga saga*]		1 stanza from *Hafgerðingadrápa* (Anon *Hafg* 2[IV])
**Hallfreðar saga*	c. 1220	poetry probably pre-1014
**Heiðarvíga saga*	c. 1200 (or c.1260)	much poetry (Eviðs, Tindr, Gestr) pre-1200, possibly pre-1014
**Kormáks saga*	c. 1220	most poetry probably pre-1014
[*Ljósvetninga saga*]	c. 1220–50	[no poetry]
[*Reykdœla saga*]	c. 1250	[one *helmingr* = *Glúm* 3]
[*Valla-Ljóts saga*]	c. 1220–40 (or any time in C13th?)	[no poetry]
[*Vápnfirðinga saga*]	c. 1225–50	[no poetry]
Víga-Glúms saga	c. 1230–40	poetry pre-1200, possibly pre-1014, but doubt about *Glúm* 1

Table 4. Sagas of Icelanders containing poetry generally dated between 1250–80

Saga	Date	Comment
Bergbúa þáttr	C13th (?)	connection with Hallmundr of *Gr* (HallmGr)
Eiríks saga rauða	c. 1265–1300	3 stanzas likely post-1250
Gísla saga Súrssonar	c. 1250	views vary widely on the date of the poetry; some place up to two thirds early, others see most stanzas composed at some time during C12th and/or up to time of saga's composition
**Gunnlaugs saga*	c. 1270–80	many stanzas probably spurious; fragments of two encomia possibly authentic
[*Hrafnkels saga*]	c.1300 (or by 1264)[i]	[no poetry]
[*Hœnsa-Þóris saga*]	c. 1250–70	[no poetry]
Kumblbúa þáttr (*Kumbl*)		anywhere between c. 1150–1250
Laxdœla saga c	. 1230–60	small amount of poetry, most probably taken from lost saga of Þorgils Hǫlluson; mention made (without quotation) of several encomia for Icelanders
Vatnsdœla saga	c. 1270–80	one stanza shared with *Hallfreðar saga*

Note: As with **Table 3**, these datings are approximate and in some cases have been disputed. The works that fall within this chronological group have often been termed 'classical'. Sagas containing stanzas by characters mentioned in *Skáldatal* as court poets are again prefaced with an asterisk.

[i] According to Hermann Pálsson, *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga* (Copenhagen, 1971).

Table 5. Sagas of Icelanders containing poetry generally dated 1280–1400 or later

Saga	Date	Comment
Bandamanna saga	c. 1250/c. 1300	probably post-1280; stanzas possibly early C14th
Bárðar saga	c. 1350–80	poetry and prose post-1280 in present form but may have some traditional antecedents; *Bárð* 6 from *Ldn* (*St*)
[*Finnboga saga ramma*]	1300–50	[no poetry]
[*Fljótsdœla saga*]	1500–59/1300–1400[i]	[no poetry]
Flóamanna saga	c. 1290–1350+ 1 independent stanza; 2 stanzas shared with episode in *Ldn*	
Grettis saga	c. 1310–20/c. 1400	small core of stanzas probably pre-1250 (1 in *SnE*, 2 in *Ldn*), the remainder perhaps authorial or of early C14th composition
Harðar saga	C14th	an earlier version may have existed in C13th; poetry C14th of same date as prose
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings;	c. 1300–50 in present form, may have earlier antecedents	*Ldn* connection; poetry probably older than present saga
[*Kjalnesinga saga*]	1310–20	[no poetry]
Króka-Refs saga	1325–75	3 *dróttkvætt* stanzas possibly composed by saga author
Njáls saga	1275–85	only 23 sts of poetry (incl. 6 from *Kristni*/*Ldn*) belong to 'original' text, the rest added later, but not much later than saga date (date of *Darraðarljóð*; Fulk, edn in *SkP* V suggests C10th-early C11th)
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr (*StjǫrnODr*)	prose text C14th; poem 1 possibly pre-1200; poem 2 probably C14th	
**Svarfdœla saga*	1350–1400, but evidence of a C13th predecessor (evidence of *Ldn*); stanzas probably contemporary with earlier (c. 1240–80) version of saga, except possibly C10th *Þjsk Lv 1a (*Svarfd* 5, also in *Ldn*)	
Þórðar saga hreðu	c. 1350	poetry contemporary with prose and possibly composed by saga author

(continued)

TABLE 5—CONCLUDED

[*Þorskfirðinga saga*/ *Gull-Þóris saga*]	1300–50	[no poetry]
Víglundar saga	end C14th–beginning C 15th	poetry of similar date, possibly composed by saga author

Note: As with **Tables 3** and **4**, dating is approximate, although most scholars are in broad agreement on the dates within this group. Sagas of this group have often been called 'post-classical'. Sagas containing stanzas by characters mentioned in *Skáldatal* as court poets are prefaced with an asterisk.

[i] According to Stefán Karlsson, 'Aldur Fljótsdæla sögu', in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (ed.), *Stafkrókar. Ritgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson* (Reykjavík, 2000), pp. 119–34. Revised from original publication of 1994.

Table 6. Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders quoted in Old Icelandic non-saga sources

Saga Name	Poet/Poem	Quoted in:
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	BjHít Lv 15/7–8 (*BjH* 20)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, pp. 15, 70)
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (*Eg*)[i]	Egill Lv 8/1–4 (*Eg* 12)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 40)
	Egill Lv 15/5–6 (*Eg* 20)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 102)
	Egill Lv 46 (*Eg* 130)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, p. 114)
	Egill Lv 48/5–8 (*Eg* 132)	*LaufE* (*LaufE* 1979, p. 375)
	Egill *St* 23 and 24/1–4 (*Eg* 94–5)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 9)
	Egill *Hfl* 1/1–4 (*Eg* 34)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 94)
	Egill *Hfl* 2/1–4 (*Eg* 35)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 12)
	Egill *Hfl* 11/5–8 (*Eg* 44)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 87)
	Egill *Hfl* 17/7–8 (*Eg* 50)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p.58)
	Egill *Arkv* 8/1–4 (*Eg* 104)	*Skm* (W) (W 1924, p. 112)
	Egill *Arkv* 15 (*Eg* 111)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, p. 63)
	Egill *Arkv* 17/5–8 (*Eg* 113)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 18)
	Egill *Arkv* 24 (*Eg* 120)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, p. 110)
	Egill *Arkv* 25 (*Eg* 121)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, pp. 99, 116)
Eyrbyggja saga	Þmáhl *Máv* 1/1–2 (*Eb* 3)	SnSt *Ht*^{III} (*SnE* 2007, p. 8)
	Þmáhl *Máv* 9 (*Eb* 11)	= Þmáhl *Máv 9a*^{IV} (*Ldn* 3) (*ÍF* 1, p. 115)
Grettis saga	Grett Lv 25–6 (*Gr* 57–8)	Grett Lv 25–6 (*Ldn* 26–7^{IV}) (*ÍF* 1, pp. 280–3)
	Grett Lv 31/1–4 (*Gr* 63)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 68)
Gunnlaugs saga	Gunnll Lv12/1–4 (*Gunnl* 19)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 63)
Hallfreðar saga	Hfr Lv 11/1–2 (*Hallfr* 14)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, p. 98)
Hávarðar saga	Hávh Lv (*Háv* 4)	= Þþyn Lv 1^{IV} (*Ldn* 10) (*ÍF* 1, pp. 202–3, *Flat*)
Heiðarvíga saga	Gestr Lv 1–2 (*Heið* 1–2)	*SnE* (W), Lv 2/1; *LaufE* (*LaufE* 1979, pp. 405, 371)[ii]
	Eviðs Lv 7/1–6 (*Heið* 17)	*FoGT* (*FoGT* 2014, p. 2)

(continued)

TABLE 6—CONCLUDED

Kormáks saga	HólmgB Lv 6/I–4 (*Korm* 40/I–4)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, p. 66)
	HólmgB Lv 9/7–8 (*Korm* 43/7–8)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, pp. 201–2) attributed to a 'Bjǫrn'
	KormǪ Lv 65^{III} (not in extant saga text)	*TGT* (*TGT* 1884, pp. 22, 88, 200)
Svarfdœla saga	Þjsk Lv 1a (*Svarfd* 5)	= Þjsk Lv $1b^{IV}$ (*Ldn* 21) (*ÍF* I, p. 254)
Víga-Glúms saga	VGl Lv 8/I–4 (*Glúm* 8)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, pp. 73–4)
	Brúsi Lv 1 (*Glúm* 10)	*Ldn* ($Þb^{X}$) (*Ldn* 1921, p. 116)
	Eþver Lv 2 (*Glúm* 11)	*Ldn* ($Þb^{X}$) (*Ldn* 1921, p. 110)
	VGl Lv 10 (*Glúm* 12)	*Skm* (*SnE* 1998, I, pp. 7, 67–8), *Ldn* ($Þb^{X}$) (*Ldn* 1921, p. 110)

Notes:
[i] Not all the citations from *Egils saga* in *Snorra Edda* or the *Third Grammatical Treatise* are in all manuscripts of those works. All are ascribed to Egill, although their sources in particular poems are not indicated. The *Arinbjarnarkviða* stanzas traditionally numbered 24 and 25 do not appear in any *Egils saga* manuscript and may possibly be from another poem; see Þorgeir Sigurðsson, 'The Unreadable Poem of Arinbjǫrn: Preservation, Meter, and a Restored Text' (PhD thesis, University of Iceland, 2019), pp. 83–6. For details given in this Table, see Egill's poetry ed. Margaret Clunies Ross in *SkP* V (forthcoming).
[ii] Gestr's stanzas are in the section of *Heið* recalled from memory by Jón Ólafsson in the eighteenth century, and taken by him from *LaufE*, where they may have originated either in the Codex Wormianus (W) of Snorri's *Edda* or directly from a MS of *Heið*. The first line of Gestr Lv 2 is recorded in W (p. 168).

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Poetry in an Icelandic Environment

Everyman a Poet

According to the sagas of Icelanders Everyman (and rather less often Everywoman) was a poet – or potentially so. The art of poetry, expressed mostly in skaldic *lausavísur* and recorded in writing by anonymous saga authors, is implicitly represented there as a skill available to all to varying degrees and mastered by a good many men and some women living in the Icelandic countryside during the Settlement Age and the following century. Even *draugar* [revenants], characters appearing in dreams and apparently inanimate objects, like prescient stones and cloaks hanging on walls, are credited with the power of poetic speech in sagas of Icelanders.[1] Although it is acknowledged in the texts of many sagas that some men had a reputation for their poetic skills and were the composers of named and well-known poems, poetry in the form of *lausavísur* is attributed to many of the characters in sagas of Icelanders, including some individuals who do not play a prominent part in the narrative. In effect, the family saga presents the art of poetry as having been democratised in Iceland, in contrast to the elitist culture of the Norwegian and other Scandinavian courts, at which select skalds, mainly from Iceland and Norway, practised their skills in a highly competitive environment and were handsomely rewarded for them.[2]

1 There are many such examples: a wet cloak hanging on the wall of a booth at an assembly in *Laxdœla saga* (*ÍF* 5, p. 198); a severed human head in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*ÍF* 4, p. 116); a voice from inside a stone within a pagan sanctuary in *Harðar saga* (*ÍF* 13, p. 91) and the *draugar* Gunnarr in *Njáls saga* (*ÍF* 12, p. 193) and Sóti in *Harðar saga* (*ÍF* 13, pp. 41–2). Similarly wide-ranging powers of poetic composition are attributed to humans and supernatural agents in contemporary sagas (*samtíðarsögur*).

2 There are many *þættir* or short narratives about Icelanders, especially Icelandic poets, who make good at the Norwegian court and succeed against the competition in becoming the ruler's favourite skald; cf. Joseph Harris, 'Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga þættir*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 44 (1972),

On the whole scholars and critics have tacitly or openly regarded the presumption that every Icelander of the Settlement Age was potentially a poet as a likely literary fiction but have rarely questioned why saga writers implicitly endorsed it. Perhaps it seems like a naive question, but it is one nevertheless with some important implications, as we shall see. Those scholars who have edited the texts of sagas of Icelanders, together with editors of the poetry published separately from the prose texts, like Finnur Jónsson and E. A. Kock, have tried to address the issue by dividing the poetry in these sagas into what they consider genuine and what they estimate to be spurious, either as the invention of the saga author or of someone composing poetry in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries and passing it off as the authentic composition of a poet from the tenth or early eleventh centuries.[3]

There is a huge volume of scholarship on this topic, and it is more or less obligatory for every editor of a saga text to consider anew the question of the authenticity of the poetry in these works.[4] Such an understandable modern desire to distinguish poetry that is likely to be contemporary with the events and persons of the saga narrative from verse that shows signs of having been composed later, often much later, is a proper scientific attitude, even though in some cases it may not produce very decisive results. However, this empirical approach, which also of necessity informs the present book insofar as it is an academic enterprise, must be distinguished from an equally valid approach that notionally accepts the reality of the world of early Icelandic society as presented by thirteenth and fourteenth-century saga writers, and asks what it means in terms of medieval Icelanders' own self-image and their view of their ancestors' society.

We cannot know for certain of the extent to which the practice of composing poetry about an event or a person was a social reality in tenth- and eleventh-century Iceland, but we can recognise that the notion that poetry was in the air, as it were, conformed to other ideas that Icelanders are known to have held about the role of poetry and the status of poets, ideas they will probably

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1–27 for a characterisation of the genre and Margaret Clunies Ross, 'From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald', *alvíssmál*, 9 (1999), 55–72.

3 The division between authentic and inauthentic stanzas and poems became an organising principle in the standard edition of Finnur Jónsson (*Skj* A and B) and he was followed in this by E. A. Kock (ed.), *Den norsk-isländska skaldedigtningen*, 2 vols (Lund, 1946–50). In their editions many of the stanzas from sagas of Icelanders are split between locations within the tenth- and eleventh-century section and later sections, dated to the twelfth and later centuries, depending on whether these editors regarded the poetry as authentic or inauthentic.

4 All editions of the standard Íslenzk Fornrit (*ÍF*) series include a section on the poetry and its authenticity in their Introductions, as do most other modern editions.

have shared with other Scandinavians, but perhaps have held more intensely. For example, we can point to the importance of the art of poetry in Old Norse myth, conceptualised as a gift to men from the god Óðinn and at the same time a highly esteemed intellectual skill,[5] as well as to legal statutes, in both early Norwegian and Icelandic law codes, that aimed to control the composition of certain kinds of poetry deemed antisocial, such as *níðvísur* [slander verses] and *mansǫngsvísur* [love verses]. These legal formulations certainly require one to assume that such statutes were predicated on the existence of real-life examples of such compositions, something frequently referred to in saga literature and occasionally actually cited there.[6]

We can also point to the circumstance that, from the mid-tenth century to the mid-eleventh, Icelanders outnumbered Norwegians as royal skalds, and many of them belonged to powerful families back in Iceland, among whom the nurturing of poets was a family tradition.[7] Although most of these professional skalds never returned to live in Iceland, the prestige arising from their social position and poetic compositions must have rubbed off on their fellow countrymen. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries there was an antiquarian renewal of interest in Iceland in the composition of skaldic poetry for foreign, especially Norwegian, dignitaries, led by members of the Sturlung family, as well as a move among the local aristocracy to maintain poets in their households in imitation of aristocratic practices abroad.[8]

Another aspect of the renaissance of interest in skaldic poetry in the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, precisely the time when it is

5 See Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 83–113 and Gert Kreutzer, *Die Dichtungslehre der Skalden. Poetologische Terminologie und Autorenkommentare als Grundlagen einer Gattungspoetik*. 2nd edn (Meisenheim am Glan, 1977).

6 The relevant legal texts, both from the West Norwegian Law of the Gulaþing and from the Icelandic legal code *Grágás* are discussed, cited in the vernacular and translated into English in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man. Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre. The Viking Collection 1 (Odense, 1983); see pp. 14–18 for a translation and discussion of the texts and p. 100 for quotations in Old Norse.

7 See Kari Ellen Gade, 'Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture', in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 61–95; also Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society.* Vol. 2: *The Reception of Norse Myths in Medieval Iceland*. The Viking Collection 10 (Odense, 1998), pp. 173–82 and Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*. *The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001), pp. 130–43.

8 The thirteenth-century situation has been most thoroughly researched by Guðrún Nordal in her *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 117–95.

assumed saga writing was also beginning, was the appearance of a number of scholarly treatises on the Icelandic language and vernacular poetry. These works, beginning with the mid-twelfth-century *First Grammatical Treatise*, continuing with the *Edda* of Snorri Sturluson (c. 1225), and the later *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises* (c. 1250 and c.1340 respectively), also attest to a profound local interest in and knowledge of Old Norse-Icelandic poetry.[9] Through the plentiful quotations of vernacular examples, especially in Snorri's *Edda* and the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, they also reveal the existence of a large number of poets and poetic compositions, most of them considered to be of Icelandic provenance, that are completely unknown from other sources, but were obviously familiar to the authors of these treatises.[10] There was evidently more poetry circulating in Iceland both before and after

9 For the *First Grammatical Treatise* see Hreinn Benediktsson (ed.), *The First Grammatical Treatise*. University of Iceland Publications in Linguistics 1 (Reykjavík, 1972); for the four parts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* see Anthony Faulkes (ed.) *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols (University College London, 1998); *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd edn (University College London, 2005) and *Snorri Sturluson Edda. Háttatal*. 2nd edn (University College London, 2007). These editions are referred to by the abbreviated titles *SnE* 1998, *SnE* 2005 and *SnE* 2007 respectively throughout this book. There is an edition of both the *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises* by Björn Magnússon Ólsen (ed.), *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlingers prolog og to andre tillæg*. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 12 (Copenhagen, 1884), and a separate edition of the fourth treatise by Margaret Clunies Ross and Jonas Wellendorf (eds), *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise* (University College London, 2014). These two editions are given the short titles *TGT* 1884 and *FoGT* 2014 respectively in this book. It has been argued that the scholarly Icelandic interest in skaldic poetry, both in its composition and its recording, was stimulated by the teaching of *grammatica* in the classroom, where the elements of Latin grammar, metrics and other essential tools of medieval literacy were taught. It has been suggested that in Icelandic schools teachers may have illustrated their lessons with vernacular as well as Latin examples. This suggestion was first put forward by Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 19–25. More recently Mikael Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 113 (Berlin and Boston, 2020), has argued that this scholarly interest was the principal spur that led to the development of the Icelandic prosimetrical saga form as a whole. See especially his ch. 4, 'Prosimetrical Narrative'.

10 A point made by Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld and Oral Poetry in the West of Iceland *c*. 1250' in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, pp. 96–115; cf. also Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Poetic Sources of the Old Icelandic Grammatical Treatises', in Marialuisa Caparrini *et al.* (eds), *La Letteratura di istruzione nel medioevo Germanico. Studi in onore di*

the early thirteenth century than was ever recorded in writing and there were more Icelandic poets at work there than are known from the historical record.

Thus in fact, but also in fiction, the notion that Everyman was, or could potentially be, a poet must have been a plausible idea in thirteenth-century Iceland and one that arguably allowed the creators of sagas of Icelanders to democratise the presence of poetry and its use within their narratives. It is argued here that this unstated premise had important flow-on effects for saga writing, not least for the narratological relationship between saga characters represented in the prose text and the poetry attributed to them. To the extent that much of this poetry was presented as first-person utterances by the protagonists, articulated as their immediate or considered reactions to the events depicted in the prose texts, a close cohesion between the two media could be achieved, and this gave saga writers and redactors the opportunity to meld the two media together in a discourse of interiority. Although, as we shall see in later chapters, saga writers and poets were not always successful in this enterprise, the most skilful of them achieved a remarkably rich and complex literary outcome.

Poetry and Prestige in Saga Iceland

To state that poetry was democratised in the imagined world of Settlement-Age Iceland requires a certain qualification. By modern standards Iceland was not a democracy and individuals were not equal, even though, unlike other parts of medieval Europe, including the rest of Scandinavia, the country had no kings nor a hereditary aristocracy.[11] It is evident from sagas of Icelanders that some men of the chieftain class, who often claimed descent from high-ranking ancestors in Norway and elsewhere, are represented as much more powerful and richer than others, while the usually subservient behaviour of a variety of male and female servants, shepherds, traders and mostly unnamed farmers of lesser importance is an assumed backdrop to the high drama of the interplay between the protagonists of the main narrative of each saga. On the whole, it is these protagonists who are credited with poetic utterances, whether or not they are known as poets from other sources, although in almost every saga there are stanzas, sometimes anonymous, attributed to characters of lesser social status or to women.[12]

Fabrizio D. Raschellà. Textes et Études du Moyen Age 87 (Barcelona and Rome, 2017), pp. 67–81.

11 The structures of the tenth-century Icelandic polity are clearly and succinctly described by Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years. History of a Marginal Society* (London, 2000), pp. 20–32.

12 These anonymous stanzas and those attributed to women have usually been relegated to the inauthentic category by modern editors, although there are not

It has frequently been observed that there was an inherent tension in early Icelandic society, expressed in its literature, between a desire to be independent of hierarchical authority, as represented particularly by the Norwegian crown, and a hankering after status and power defined in terms of a continuing connection with those very political systems from which the sagas assert the first settlers were escaping.[13] A good example, of many possible, that demonstrates what historians of some modern ex-colonial societies have termed a 'cultural cringe',[14] is the anonymous poem *Nóregs konungatal* [Enumeration of the kings of Norway] (Anon *Nkt*[II]), composed c. 1190 in honour of Jón Loptsson of Oddi, who was the most powerful chieftain in Iceland at that time. This poem is an encomium in imitation of the much older *kviðuháttr* [poem's form] encomia *Ynglingatal* [Enumeration of the Ynglingar] (Þjóð *Yt*[I]) and *Háleygjatal* [Enumeration of the Háleygir (the people of Hálogaland)] (Eyv *Hál*[I]), both composed for Norwegian rulers. *Nóregs konungatal* traces Jón Loptsson's ancestry back to the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri [Fair-hair], and its composer is able to sustain the idea of royal descent because Jón's mother was an illegitimate daughter of the Norwegian king Magnús berfœttr [Barelegs] Óláfsson (r. 1093–1103).[15] Thus the poem tacitly claims parity for its Icelandic subject with other members of the Norwegian royal house.

Nóregs konungatal is one of the most blatant examples of the Icelandic desire to emulate Norwegian elite culture on Icelandic soil. It is a product of the late twelfth century. The question arises in the context of a discussion of the development of the sub-genre of the *Íslendingasögur* of whether such aspirations to cultural elitism by means of poetry can also be discerned in stanzas assumed to have been composed in the tenth and early eleventh

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always sufficient grounds upon which to distinguish them from the supposedly genuine stanzas. It seems to have been automatic for Finnur Jónsson to classify most women's utterances as *uægte* [inauthentic] in his edition of 1912–15.

13 See, among other treatments of this subject, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Starkaðr, Loki og Egill Skalla-Grímsson', in Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds), *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*. 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1977), II, pp. 759–68. English translation by John Tucker, 'Starkaðr, Loki, and Egill Skallagrímsson' in John Tucker (ed.), *Sagas of the Icelanders. A Book of Essays* (New York and London, 1989), pp. 146–59. Repr. in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *At fortælle Historien. Telling History*, ed. Sofie Meulengracht Sørensen (Trieste, 2001), pp. 27–35.

14 This phrase was coined by the Australian writer A. A. Phillips in an article, 'The Cultural Cringe' *Meanjin*, 9:4 (1950), 299–302 to refer to the Australian tendency to regard that country's literature and culture as inferior to that of Great Britain, which many Australians then thought of as the motherland and from which many of their ancestors had emigrated.

15 For an edition, see that of Kari Ellen Gade in *SkP* II (2009), pp. 761–806.

centuries. The evidence, for reasons to be discussed further in subsequent chapters, is fragmentary, but there is sufficient to allow us to claim with some confidence that encomia in honour of local men of a kind usually associated with skaldic compositions for kings and jarls in Norway were current in tenth- and early eleventh-century Iceland. The evidence comes from sagas of Icelanders themselves and also from historical works and treatises on poetics.

Tables 7a–c (at the end of the chapter) list all the long poems, as contrasted with *lausavísur*, quoted or mentioned by name in sagas of Icelanders. **Table 7a** records references in medieval sources to encomia or other long skaldic poems by Icelandic poets in honour of Icelanders who lived in the tenth or early to mid-eleventh centuries and is arranged alphabetically by source text. **Table 7b** notes encomia said to have been composed by Icelandic skalds of the same period for foreign rulers, which have been recorded or mentioned only in sagas of Icelanders and not in historical compilations, while **Table 7c** lists all quotations from other genres of long poems (or the mention of these) to be found in sagas of Icelanders but not in other sources. The last-named include several examples of *níðvísur* [slander verses] mostly mentioned rather than cited in full on account of their risqué subject matter, and other texts that cannot easily be fitted into existing genres, such as the *Sǫðulkolluvísur* [Saddle-head verses] of Grettir Ásmundarson and Sveinn á Bakka and the *Máhliðingavísur* of Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson, as well as the *fornyrðislag* [old story metre] poem *Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga*.

Much of the information presented in **Tables 7a–c** is discussed further in later chapters. In the present context, which concentrates on **Tables 7a** and **b**, several recurring features stand out. Firstly, most of the men for whom the encomia listed in **Table 7a** were composed were important chieftains or farmers of good family and persons of considerable influence in their districts. The chieftain Illugi svarti [the Black] Hallkelsson from Gilsbakki in Borgarfjarðarsýsla is mentioned in many sagas and in *Landnámabók* [The Book of Settlements] as one of the most prominent members of the Gilsbekkingar family.[16] He was involved in many local disputes, and one of these was evidently the subject of the *drápa*, or long poem with a *stef* [refrain], composed in his honour by the poet Oddr, whose patronymic is unknown. In *Bárðar saga*, in which Oddr is also mentioned as the composer of an *erfidrápa* or memorial poem in honour of Hjalti Þórðarson, who settled Hjaltadalur in Skagafjörður, he is called Oddr breiðfirðingr, that is, someone hailing from Breiðafjörður.[17] Oddr's lack of patronymic perhaps suggests that he was a man of relatively humble origin, who had made his way in Icelandic society by means of his poetry, possibly even as a semi-professional skald.

16 See *ÍF* 3, p. 58 n. 2 and *ÍF* 1, pp. 54, 55, 75, 83–5.

17 *ÍF* 13, p. 171 and n. 2.

Even though he was not known as a poet himself, Illugi svarti's family included several skalds. Tindr Hallkelsson, who composed for the Norwegian Hákon jarl Sigurðarson of Hlaðir (r. c. 970–c. 995), was his brother. Aside from eleven stanzas of a *Hákonardrápa* [*Drápa* about Hákon] (Tindr *Hákdr*[I]), two stanzas by Tindr (*Heið* 13–14) have been preserved in *Heiðarvíga saga* [The Saga of the Heath-slayings].[18] One of Illugi's sons was the poet Gunnlaugr ormstunga [Serpent-tongue], who is the subject of a saga himself, in which he is credited with the composition of thirteen *lausavísur* and several fragments of encomia for foreign rulers, as listed in **Table 7b**. Although doubts have been cast on the authenticity of much of Gunnlaugr's poetry, it is reasonable to assume that the saga character of that name had some kind of historical counterpart, as he and his family are mentioned in *Landnámabók*.[19] One stanza of a *kvæði* [poem] that the poet Þórðr Kolbeinsson is said in *Gunnlaugs sa*ga to have composed about him is quoted in that saga (*Gunnl* 21) but is not attested from any other source. Þórðr, from Hítarnes in western Iceland, is known from *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* as the love-rival of that saga's hero Bjǫrn Arngeirsson, with twelve *lausavísur* attributed to him, and also as a court poet, although only part of his *Eiríksdrápa* [*Drápa* about Eiríkr] (Þkolb *Eirdr*[I]) in honour of Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson of Hlaðir (d. c. 1023) has survived.[20]

Gunnlaugr's brother Hermundr was the subject of a *drápa* by Þórðr's son Arnórr jarlaskáld [Jarls' Poet] (b. c. 1011), whose oeuvre included a number of poems for several of the jarls of Orkney and the rulers of Norway. Hermundr (d. c. 1073) figures as one of the confederates in *Bandamanna saga* [The Saga of the Confederates], and the unusual cause of his death is recounted towards the end of that saga.[21] Only one couplet from Arnórr's *Hermundardrápa* [*Drápa* about Hermundr] (Arn *Herm*[III]) has been recorded in several of the manuscripts of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. It is probably a fragment of an *erfidrápa* or memorial poem, as it petitions God to help Hermundr.[22]

Hermundardrápa was apparently not the only encomium that Arnórr jarlaskáld composed for an Icelander, as there is evidence from the final

18 *ÍF* 3, pp. 307–8.

19 *ÍF* 1, pp. 54, 55, 83, 85 and 214.

20 See the edition of the surviving stanzas of *Eiríksdrápa* by Jayne Carroll in *SkP* I (2012), pp. 487–513.

21 Ch. 12, *ÍF* 7, pp. 360–1. Hermundr suffered sudden intense pain in his armpit and collapsed with what might have been a heart attack or stroke. The saga, however, implies that sorcery was the cause and that he had been hit by some kind of supernatural missile (see Hallvard Magerøy (ed.), *Bandamanna saga* (University College London, 1981), p. 63, note to p. 35/3–5).

22 See the edition of the couplet by Diana Whaley in *SkP* III (2017), p. 11. It is not absolutely certain that the Hermundr named in the couplet is Hermundr Illugason, as only the given name is mentioned, although this is probable.

chapter of *Laxdœla saga* [The Saga of the Laxdœlir] that he also composed an *erfidrápa* for the important chieftain Gellir Þorkelsson, son of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir and her fourth husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson. The narrative does not quote any of this poem, but it names the composer and the honorand and refers to part of the poem's contents: 'Hann [Gellir] lét gera kirkju at Helgafelli virðuliga mjǫk, svá sem Arnórr jarlaskáld váttar í erfidrápu þeiri, er hann orti um Gelli, ok kveðr þar skýrt á þetta'.[23] [He [Gellir] had a church built at Helgafell very magnificently, as Arnórr Jarls' Poet attests in the memorial poem that he composed about Gellir, and there he speaks clearly about that.]

We also hear mention in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* of a *drápa* that Bjǫrn is said to have composed about the Apostle Thomas, who was the dedicatee of a church Bjǫrn had had built at Vellir in Hítardalur (see **Table 7b**). No record of this poem has survived, and it may well be the fabrication of a later age.[24]

Another local chieftain, who was even more famous in saga narratives than Illugi svarti was Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson who played a key part in many sagas involving feuds that took place in the west of Iceland during the tenth and early eleventh centuries. He appears as a character in *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Gísla saga*, and several other works. As has been briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, Snorri *goði* was the subject of the poem *Hrafnsmál* [Raven's Speech], celebrating a number of battles in which he was victorious, by the poet Þormóðr Trefilsson, of which five stanzas are cited piecemeal in *Eyrbyggja saga*, but nowhere else (see **Table 7a**). However, this poem was undoubtedly well-known and esteemed in Iceland. It was imitated by the thirteenth-century historian and poet Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84) in a poem of the same name (Sturl *Hrafn*[II]) that uses the same distinctive metre, Haðarlag [Hǫðr's metre]. Þormóðr Trefilsson was the son of Þorkell trefill [Fringe] Rauða-Bjarnarson, described in *Laxdœla saga* as a great chieftain and a sage.[25] No other poetry by Þormóðr has been recorded.

The evidence presented here demonstrates that praise-poetry for non-royal subjects living in Iceland and composed by Icelandic skalds was a lively poetic genre in the tenth and early eleventh centuries and arguably thereafter. This is indeed what one might expect of a society that valued poetry highly and regarded it as an elite art. In the context of the evident democratisation of skaldic poetry in sagas of Icelanders, however, it presents an interesting paradox, which is underlined by the fact that very little of this encomiastic

23 *Laxdœla saga*, ch. 78, *ÍF* 5, p. 229.

24 See *ÍF* 3, p. 163 and n. 2; also Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland. Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400.* Subsidia Hagiographica 78 (Brussels, 1994), p. 41 and n. 61.

25 Ch. 10, *ÍF* 5, p. 20: 'hann var hǫfðingi mikill ok vitringr'; cf. also *ÍF* 4, p. 67 n. 1.

poetry, employing the most highly valued skaldic genres of the *drápa* and the *erfidrápa*, has been preserved, either in *Íslendingasögur* themselves or in other works of Icelandic provenance, such as Snorri's *Edda* and the *Third Grammatical Treatise*. Instead, what we have are fragments of these texts or mere allusions to them.

It looks from the evidence of the saga texts as if their authors deliberately refrained from using encomia about their protagonists in these narratives, even though some writers refer to them either without quoting any poetic text or by citing just one stanza or a couplet to attest to the poem's existence. It could of course be argued that these authors did not know any more of the poetry than what they quoted, although in some cases, like three of Egill Skalla-Grímsson's long poems, this cannot be true, because these poems were written into later versions of his saga (see **Table 7b**). It is unknown whether they were available in oral form to whoever composed the saga or had possibly been written down separately on parchment. Only the first stanza of *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons] (Egill *St*) occurs in the main medieval exemplar of *Egils saga*, Möðruvallabók (M), but it is found in the post-medieval transcripts of a different medieval redaction of the saga; nothing of *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head-Ransom] (Egill *Hfl*) is recorded in M, but it occurs in two other redactions, while *Arinbjarnarkviða* [Poem about Arinbjǫrn] (Egill *Arkv*) is strictly speaking absent from all medieval redactions of the saga. It is found only on a single leaf (fol. 99v) of M right after the end of *Egils saga*, where it is written in a different, though contemporary, hand from those of the main text.[26] Finnur Jónsson and Jón Helgason, who both made major contributions to the study of *Egils saga*, held that these long poems were probably not conceived as part of the original text of the saga, a position with which I agree.[27] However, I think it probable that whoever composed the primary version of *Egils saga* intended to make the saga audience aware of Egill's long poems as an extradiegetic resource by referring to them by means of the insertion of their opening stanzas into the saga text, thereby creating a multivocal text without holding up its narrative flow. The same may be true

[26] Þorgeir Sigurðsson has done much in recent years to elucidate the text of *Arinbjarnarkviða* and its manuscript history; see his 'The Unreadable Poem of Arinbjǫrn: Preservation, Meter, and a Restored Text' (PhD thesis, University of Iceland, 2019).

[27] See Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar tilligemed Egils större kvad.* Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 17 (Copenhagen, 1886–8), pp. xxx–xxxi and Jón Helgason (ed.), *Skjaldevers*. Nordisk Filologi. Tekster og Lærebøger til universitetsbrug. Serie A: Tekster 12 (Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm, 1962), p. 29. See also Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Verse and Prose in *Egils saga*', in Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (eds), *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*. The Viking Collection 18 (Odense, 2010), pp. 191–211.

of the author of *Gunnlaugs saga*, but in his case the references to Gunnlaugr's encomia for various foreign dignitaries may imitate the practice of the author of *Egils saga* rather than being a genuine allusion to past compositions.[28]

The apparent avoidance of encomia in honour of Icelanders of the Age of Settlement by composers of sagas of Icelanders is in clear contrast to the way in which the authors of some contemporary sagas incorporated encomia about Icelanders of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries into their prose texts. Although by no means all writers of contemporary sagas made use of skaldic poetry in representing historical events,[29] several of those who did cited poetry in their narratives by Icelandic skalds celebrating individual Icelanders. The cluster of poets from the circle of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (d. 1213) are notable for their compositions, some of which appear in the saga about Hrafn, like Guðmundr Svertingsson's *Hrafnsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Hrafn] (GSvert *Hrafndr*[IV]), of which eleven whole or part *dróttkvætt* stanzas are preserved. These were probably composed shortly after Hrafn's death, and celebrate his life, his pilgrimages to Canterbury and Compostela, his medical skills and his almost saintly character. His association with the bishop-elect Guðmundr Arason, with whom he travelled to Norway in 1202, probably accounts for the preservation of some stanzas of the encomium in *Guðmundar saga B*. The fragments of a saga about Árón Hjǫrleifsson (1199–1255), who was a staunch follower of Bishop Guðmundr, also contain poetry in praise of Árón by the priest Þormóðr Óláfsson,[30] most likely composed in connection with the mid-fourteenth century campaign for the bishop's canonisation. The desire to boost these subjects' reputations in a hagiographical context probably provided a strong motive for the inclusion of poetry about them in their sagas and in those of the bishop they supported.

If the omission of existing encomia for Icelanders of the tenth and eleventh centuries was a deliberate move or at least a conscious avoidance on the part of the authors of emergent sagas of Icelanders, we must seek for a reason or reasons for it. In doing so, it is noteworthy that most of the short citations of encomiastic poetry or short allusions to its existence that have been preserved come from sagas that are generally held to have been among the

28 In Gunnlaugr's case, there is no independent evidence of his activity as a court poet, aside from a brief mention in *Skáldatal* (Jón Sigurðsson *et al.* (eds), *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Edda Snorronis Sturlaei*. 3 vols (Copenhagen, 1848–87), III, pp. 257, 266) that he served Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson. The *stef* of his *Sigtryggsdrápa* [Poem with refrain for Sigtryggr [silkenbeard]] (Gunnll *Sigdr*) is suspiciously similar to one of the refrains of Egill's *Hǫfuðlausn*; compare Gunnll *Sigdr* 3 (*Gunnl* 6) with Egill's *Hfl* 12 and 15 (*Eg* 45 and 48).

29 Cf. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, pp. 114–16.

30 There are two fragments, one of six stanzas in *dróttkvætt* metre (ÞórmÓl *Ár*[IV]) and the other of four stanzas in *hrynhent* [flowing rhymed] (ÞórmÓl *Árhryn*[IV]).

earliest examples of the sub-genre (see **Table 3** in Chapter 1)[31] or are found within the *skáldasögur*, the special sub-group of poet biographies. A good number of the sagas in which we find such citations or references are set in the west of Iceland and are themselves likely to be of western provenance. It may then be that such references were experimental and, after the early days of the sub-genre's development, came to be thought of as intrusive in terms of the saga's narrative flow and overall world view. It seems that they were later largely abandoned in favour of *lausavísur* which could be more easily integrated into the narrative fabric of the saga. The move towards a multivocal text may also have led some saga authors to deliberately break up existing long poems into smaller units for quotation in their saga *prosimetrum*, such as we see probably happened in the staging of the *Máhlíðingavísur* in *Eyrbyggja saga* (see **Table 7c**). Several scholars have indeed proposed in recent decades that some long poems were deliberately broken up into *lausavísur* and cited discontinuously as the speech of saga characters at different high points of saga texts.[32]

In later chapters we will explore the specifically literary reasons that authors of sagas of Icelanders might have had for not using encomiastic poetry about their subjects, or of doing so only to a limited extent. Here, however, it is proposed that the elitist thrust of skaldic encomia attached to eminent characters in sagas of Icelanders was deliberately moderated within their developing *prosimetra* as the implicit theory of democratised poetic composition led to the exploration of multiple points of view within the saga narrative rather than the encomium's exclusive focus on its honorand. Thus in the developed texts of sagas of Icelanders we find variously the viewpoints of the narrator, the various protagonists and a number of subsidiary characters rather than a valorisation of a great man through the lens of a skaldic encomium. The multivocal nature of these sagas could then be reinforced

31 An apparent exception is *Bárðar saga* from **Table 5,** which dates from the fourteenth century. However, the reference there to Oddr Breiðfirðingr's *erfidrápa* for Hjalti Þórðarson is probably taken from the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Landnámabók* (dated to c. 1270–80).

32 The idea that existing long poems, chiefly the less grand skaldic kinds of the *flokkr* or *vísur* (both long poems without refrains), were deliberately broken up and inserted piecemeal into sagas of Icelanders, has been promoted by, among others, Russell Poole (e.g. 'The Origin of the *Máhlíðingavísur*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 57 (1985), 244–85) and Edith Marold, 'The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde, 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 75–124. Criteria for distinguishing long poems from *lausavísur* are complex and not always decisive; see the discussion in the General Introduction to *SkP* in *SkP* I (2012), 1, pp. xxxix–xliv.

through the attribution of poetic voices to numerous protagonists and subsidiary characters. In all probability saga authors were sometimes able to draw upon authentic voices of the past in the shape of oral compositions that had been remembered from the tenth and eleventh centuries. In other cases material was probably improved, expanded or reinvented by the saga writers themselves or by others, possibly with an antiquarian bent, who reimagined the past history of their society.[33] Thus, where it is possible to determine the age of poetry in sagas of Icelanders (and that is often not possible) we frequently find stanzas of varying date in the mix.

The democratisation of skaldic poetry within sagas of Icelanders was arguably more a consequence of ideological pressures to develop a new, inclusive literary genre that reflected Icelandic social values than an accurate representation of the Icelanders' actual social circumstances in the tenth century. Nevertheless, social realism must have played its part in the establishment of the new sub-genre, with its exclusion of skaldic poetry belonging to the elite world of the Norwegian court and its muting of encomia for local dignitaries.[34] The poets' sagas (*skáldasögur*), most of which are usually considered to be among the earliest sagas of Icelanders, reveal what must have been the consensus position among saga authors: not to use the sub-genre to represent their subjects' lives at royal courts and not to cite any of their often considerable poetic compositions for Norwegian kings and other high-ranking subjects. These were reserved for *konungasögur* and other elite biographies. On the other hand, these poets' lives and compositions at

33 Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendingadrápa*[IV], usually dated to the late twelfth century, is an example of an antiquarian poem celebrating Icelanders of the Settlement Age, and it is possible that two stanzas quoted as apparent *lausavísur* in *Njáls saga*, Þelf Lv 1 (*Nj* 27) and ÞormÓl Lv 1 (*Nj* 28 (Add 25)), are actually parts of longer poems celebrating Gunnarr Hámundarson's last stand. The second of these is probably a fourteenth-century composition.

34 Such a process of textual development in response to social change has been termed textualisation (*tekstualisering*) by the Danish scholar Ole Bruhn, writing with the sagas of Icelanders in mind, *Tekstualisering. Bidrag til en litterær antropologi* (Aarhus, 1999), p. 205: 'I det omfang, den gør den sociale verden tekstlig, gør den også den tekstlige verden social. Når flere områder af det sociale liv tekstliggøres, og flere sociale grupper begynder at artikulere sig på skrift, bliver formidlingen af de sociale interesser og konflikter også et spørgsmål om at lade forskellige tekster gå i dialog med hinanden og om at skabe overgribende modeller og spilleregler for teksternes sociale interaction.' [To the extent it makes the social world textual, it also makes the textual world social. When more areas of social life are textualised, and more social groups begin to make themselves articulate in writing, communication of social interests and conflicts also becomes a question of whether to let different texts proceed in dialogue with each other or to create overarching models and ground rules for the texts' social interaction.]

home in Iceland were appropriate subjects of *Íslendingasögur*, with the sagas of this group developing an almost formulaic biographical pattern, centred on the poet's usually unhappy love life and his rivalry with fellow Icelanders for a woman's attention.[35]

[35] See various chapters in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, de Gruyter, 2001). The *skáldasögur* comprise *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga*, with *Fóstbrœðra saga* and *Egils saga* as outliers; cf. Clunies Ross, 'The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features' in Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas*, pp. 25–49.

Table 7a. Encomia by Icelandic skalds for Icelanders of the tenth and early eleventh centuries mentioned or cited in sagas of Icelanders and/or other Icelandic texts

Text	Poet/Poem	Cited there?	Comment
Bárðar saga, ch. 22	Oddr breiðfirðingr *erfidrápa* for Hjalti Þórðarson	no	in *Ldn* (*St*, *ÍF* 1, p. 238) (cf. *ÍF* 13, p.171 n. 2)
Egils saga	*Sonatorrek*, Egill's lament for his two dead sons	yes, 1 stanza only in M (*Eg* 94)	*St* 23, 24/1–4 cited in *SnE*
Eyrbyggja saga	Oddr breiðfirðingr, *Illugadrápa* for Illugi svarti Hallkelsson	yes, two stanzas (*Eb* 1–2)	
Eyrbyggja saga	Þormóðr Trefilsson, *Hrafnsmál* for Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson and (?) his son Þóroddr	yes, five stanzas (*Eb* 20, 26, 33–5)	cited piecemeal
Fóstbræðra saga	*Þorgeirsdrápa*, *erfidrápa* for Þorgeirr Hávarsson by Þormóðr Bersason	yes, fifteen stanzas (*Fbr* 2–7, 10–18)	*Fbr* 6 is also in *Grettis saga* (*Gr* 25), *Fbr* 13 and 17 in *Óláfs saga Helga* (*ÓH*)
Gunnlaugs saga	*kvæði* that Þórðr Kolbeinsson composed about Gunnlaugr ormstunga	yes, 1 stanza, ÞKolb *Gunndr* 1 (*Gunnl* 21)	
Landnámabók (*Þb*)	Anon, *stef* of *drápa* about Bárðr Hallason killed by Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson	yes, 2 lines Anon *Bárðdr* 1^{IV} (*Ldn* 23)	not cited in *Víga-Glúms saga*
Laxdœla saga	Úlfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa*, ekphrasis for Óláfr pái Hǫskuldsson	no	twelve stanzas (ÚlfrU *Húsdr*^{III}) in *SnE* (*Skm*) plus prose narrative in *Gylf*
	Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *erfidrápa* for Gellir Þorkelsson	no	includes mention of church Gellir had built at Helgafell
Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*	Árnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *drápa* for Hermundr	yes, couplet Arn *Herm* 1^{III}	extant in mss R, T^{x}, W, U and B of *SnE* (*Skm*)

(continued)

Table 7a—concluded

	(?) Illugason, d. 1073 Vǫlu-Steinn, *Ǫgmundardrápa*[i]	yes, two *helmingar* VSt *Erf* 1–2[III]	extant in mss R, T[x], W, U, B (st. 1) and R, T[x], A and C (st. 2) of *SnE* (*Skm*)

[i] Snorri attributes two *dróttkvætt helmingar* to the poet Vǫlu-Steinn, without indicating where they come from. These stanzas are presumed to be from a poem named *Ǫgmundardrápa* (VSt *Erf*[III]) in honour of Vǫlu-Steinn's deceased son, Ǫgmundr. *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* 1, pp. 159–60) states that the son was killed at the Þorskafjörður assembly c. 1002. Vǫlu-Steinn is said there (*ÍF* 1, p.184) to have mourned his son so intensely that his other son Egill sought help from the sage Gestr Oddleifsson, who composed the opening of an *Ǫgmundardrápa*. See Introduction to VSt *Erf*[III] for debate about whether Gestr or Vǫlu-Steinn composed this poem and note parallels with Egill's *Sonatorrek*.

Table 7b. Encomia for foreign dignitaries of the tenth to eleventh centuries mentioned/recorded only in sagas of Icelanders

Text	Poet/Poem	Cited there?	Comment
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *Belgskakadrápa* for Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson (*ÍF* 3, p. 119)	no	may = ÞKolb *Eirdr*[1]
	Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *drápa* for S. Óláfr	no	see *ÍF* 3, pp. 126–7
	Bjǫrn, *drápa* for Apostle Thomas	no	*BjH* ch. 19, *ÍF* 3, p. 163[i]
Egils saga	Egill, *Aðalsteinsdrápa*, for King Aðalsteinn of England	yes, 1 stanza, 1 *stef* Egill *Aðdr* 1–2 (*Eg* 21–2)	in M only
	Egill, *Hǫfuðlausn*, for Eiríkr blóðøx in York	yes Egill *Hfl* 1–21 (*Eg* 34–54)	in Wolf and C-text only; some stanzas in *SnE*
	Egill, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, for Arinbjǫrn *hersir*	no	on M fol. 99v after saga text; some stanzas in *SnE* and *TGT*
	Egill, *Skjaldardrápa*, shield poem on gift from Einarr skálaglamm Helgason	yes, 1 stanza Egill, *Skjalddr* 1 (*Eg* 126)	in M only
	Egill, *Berudrápa*, shield poem for Þorsteinn *hersir* Þóruson	yes, 1 stanza Egill, *Berdr* 1 (*Eg* 128)	in M only
Gunnlaugs saga	Gunnlaugr, *kvæði* for Aðalráðr (Æthelred II), king of England	yes, 1 *stef* only Gunnll *Aðdr* 1 (Gunnl 3)	
	Gunnlaugr, *drápa* for Sigtryggr silkiskegg in Dublin	yes 1.5 stanzas + 1 *stef* Gunnll *Sigdr* 1–3 (*Gunnl* 7, 8, 6)	
	Gunnlaugr, *flokkr* for Sigurðr jarl in Gautland (Sweden)	no	

(continued)

Table 7b—concluded

Hallfreðar saga	*kvæði* for Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson	yes one couplet cited from *upphaf* (r. c. 1000–c. 1014). Hfr *Eirdr* 1 (*Hallfr* 31)

[i] *Bjarnar saga* (ch. 19, *ÍF* 3, p. 163) backs up this information by referring to the testimony of Rúnólfr Dagsson (or Dálksson), a well-born priest of Helgafell according to Ari Þorgilsson (see *ÍF* 3, p. 163 n. 2). Bjǫrn built a church at his farm, Vellir, in Hítardalur, and dedicated it to St Thomas.

Table 7c. Other long poems named, cited or partially cited in sagas of Icelanders

Text	Poet, poem	Comment
Bergbúa þáttr	[(?) Hallmundr, *Hallmundarkviða* (modern title)] Hallm *Hallkv* 1–12 (*Bergb* 1–12)	[12 stanzas spoken by creature from cave]
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa	Bjǫrn, *Grámagaflim* [Grey-belly libel], BjHít *Grám* 1–3 (*BjH* 26–8)	3 *níðvísur* impugning Þórðr's mother's conception of him (ch. 20, *ÍF* 3, pp. 168–9)
	Þórðr Kolbeinsson, *Kolluvísur* (?) [Cow verses]	*níð*, mentioned but not cited in *BjH* (ch. 20, *ÍF* 3, p. 170)
	Þórðr and Bjǫrn	two scurrilous poems (uncited) that Bjǫrn and Þórðr allegedly composed about each other's wives, Bjǫrn's *Eykyndilsvísur* 'Eykyndill's poem' and Þórðr's *Daggeisla* 'Light-beam of the Day' (*ÍF* 3, pp. 174–5)
Eyrbyggja saga	Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson, *Máhlíðingavísur* [Stanzas about the People of Mávahlíð] (*Eb* 3–19)	17 stanzas broken up in-text but clearly part of a unitary poem
Fóstbrœðra saga	*Fbr* 20 = *Hávm* 84	3 lines quoted, supposedly the reminiscence of a slave named Loðinn in Greenland about loose women (*ÍF* 6, 225, ch. 21)
	Fbr 32–3 = Anon *Bjark* 1–2^{III}	Þormóðr recites from *Húskarlahvǫt* at Battle of Stiklastaðir (*ÍF* 6, 262–3, ch. 24)

(continued)

Table 7c—concluded

Grettis saga	Grettir Ásmundarson, Sveinn á Bakka, *Sǫðulkolluvísur* 'Saddle-head verses' (*Gr* 3I–7)	7 stanzas, cited in ch. 47 (*ÍF* 7, pp. 148–51); poem named in-text
	Grettir, *flokkr* about Hallmundr Grett *Hallfl* 1–2 (*Gr* 46–7)	1 stanza and a couplet cited in ch. 57 (*ÍF* 7, pp. 184–5)
	Hallmundr, *Hallmundarkviða* HallmGr *Hallkv* 1–6 (*Gr* 5I–6)	7 stanzas cited in ch. 62 (*ÍF* 7, pp. 203–4)
	[Grettir *Ævikviður* I and II, Grett *Ævkv I* 1–3 (*Gr* 22–4), Grett *Ævkv II* 1–4 (*Gr* 39–42)	[titles not named in prose text]
Hallfreðar saga	Hallfreðr, *Uppreistardrápa*	*drápa* about Creation or improvement (?) (*ÍF* 8, p. 178); named but not cited in saga (or anywhere else)
	Hallfreðr, *Gríssvísur* [Gríss's verses]	*hálfníð* against Gríss Sæmingsson (*ÍF* 8, pp. 188, 193), possibly comprising *Hallfr* 18–24 (Hfr Lv 15–21), though not identified as such in saga
Njals saga	Anon, *Darraðarljóð,* [Song of Dǫrruðr] *or* [Song of the Pennant] (*Nj* 53–63)	11 stanzas cited in ch. 157 (*ÍF* 12, pp. 454–8), not named precisely, but text attributes them to women weaving, and associates them with a man named Dǫrruðr
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr	unnamed *flokkr* (StjOdd *Geirfl* 1–5, 5 stanzas) and *drápa* (StjOdd *Geirdr* 1–11, 11 stanzas) composed by royal skald Dagfinnr = the dreamer Stjǫrnu-Oddi Helgason	

Note: This Table does not include *lausavísur* that modern scholars have proposed to be parts of original long poems, unless they are named in the saga texts.

3

The Authenticity Question

The Nature of the Question

The question of the authenticity of the poetry in sagas of Icelanders has come up in several contexts in the first chapters of this book. It is now time to undertake a thorough examination of this issue and consider how it affects our understanding of the nature of both the prose and poetic components of these sagas together and severally. We must first ask what the term 'authenticity' means when applied to this intertextual literary genre. The issue is complicated, not only because these sagas comprise prose and verse elements, but also because the various components may be of different ages and origins. The notion of authenticity also requires consideration of the receiving audience or audiences of saga texts: authenticity for whom, in whose eyes?

The term authenticity, when applied to works of modern literature, does not usually imply truth to historical events in the sense of being in accordance with established fact, but more often refers to a quality of verisimilitude or the appearance of being an accurate reflection of real life in the fictional world the author has created. In the case of sagas of Icelanders, these sagas as a whole are usually judged by contemporary readers and critics to be authentic in this latter sense,[1] but it cannot be presumed that medieval audiences neces-

[1] Icelandic saga critics of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, frequently applied the criterion of authenticity in the first sense to this literature and there was many a debate about the extent of the sagas' historicity before the matter was more or less settled in favour of the second sense towards the end of the first half of the twentieth century. On the subject of the historicity of Icelandic sagas, see Vésteinn Ólason, 'Norrøn litteratur som historisk kildemateriale', in Gunnar Karlsson (ed.), *Kilderne til den tidlige middelalders historie. Rapporter til den XX nordiske historikerkongres Reykjavík 1987* I. Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar 18 (Reykjavík, Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1987), pp. 30–47, and for brief summaries, Vésteinn Ólason, *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. Andrew

sarily thought likewise. The question of authenticity becomes more acute for all presumed audiences, however, when it comes to the poetry included as the characters' actual words within the saga text. Here the saga author or redactor appears to reach back into the past to record the speaking voices of his characters uttered in the form of poetry. Thus he implicitly claims to present authenticity in the first sense described above, truth to what the poet spoke.

At this point we again encounter the saga writers' fiction that we examined in Chapter 2, the idea that Everyman in Settlement-Age Iceland was or could be a poet, and this fiction can now be seen to carry the further implication that the poetry ascribed to these individuals in saga narratives is authentic in the sense of being the actual words of individuals who lived in the Settlement Age. Thus the question of authenticity underlies the very basis of the composition of sagas of Icelanders; it has been written into the structure of the sub-genre itself by its medieval creators, and has periodically surfaced whenever modern scholars question whether or not certain parts of a saga narrative or certain poems or stanzas can possibly be tenth- or eleventh-century compositions. When the prose text of a saga is considered on its own, the problem is not so great, because scholars now accept that prose texts were probably revised, shortened or lengthened in accordance with changing tastes, traditions and the likely preferences of the writers' medieval patrons and audiences,[2] but it has proved more difficult to conceive that the poetry in sagas of Icelanders might also be of diverse age and to devise stringent criteria to determine whether it is genuinely old and, if it is, exactly how old.

To further disambiguate the meaning of the term 'authenticity' in sagas of Icelanders it is necessary to acknowledge the various audiences that have received this literature, beginning with the putative audiences of the tenth- and early eleventh-century poetry composed by individuals who later figure as characters in saga texts, then carrying on with the thirteenth-century and later audiences of medieval manuscript versions of sagas, which were doubtless read aloud to them, and continuing down to the present day with listeners and readers who have consumed these texts in print form, first in Iceland and other Scandinavian countries and later around the world. All these audiences have brought differing mindsets and assumptions to the process of interpreting saga texts and have therefore had differing views, both about the authenticity of the sagas as a whole and about the poetry contained within them.

Wawn (Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 19–21 and Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 39–41.

2 See the various chapters by Glauser, Gropper and Quinn in particular in Lukas Rösli and Stefanie Gropper (eds), *In Search of the Culprit. Aspects of Medieval Authorship* (Berlin and Boston, 2021). Accessed as an ebook at https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110725339

The sagas we know from modern editions have been put together by scholars using manuscript versions of their texts, which may be of varying age and provenance, but are unlikely to have been the direct creation of the saga authors, who are anonymous, and certainly not of poets who lived in the pre-literate age. Very few autograph medieval manuscripts, written by the authors of the texts themselves, exist in any Western European language. What we do have are manuscript copies of one or more original versions of a particular text at some remove from the original. Some manuscripts of sagas of Icelanders are medieval, though none is earlier than c. 1250, the date of a fragment of *Egils saga* (AM 162 A θ fol) which is the oldest known fragment of a saga of this sub-genre. The first surviving manuscript compilation containing sagas of Icelanders alone and no other texts is Möðruvallabók, abbreviated M (AM 132 fol), generally dated to c. 1330–70. Many manuscripts of sagas of Icelanders date from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and a very large number are post-medieval, as hand-copying in Iceland continued well into the modern age. The first printed editions of sagas of Icelanders emerged, both in Iceland and in other parts of Scandinavia, principally Denmark, from the late eighteenth century onward.[3]

Even the most conservative editor of a saga text is obliged to make a number of interventions in order to render his or her subject accessible to a modern readership. Orthography, linguistic criteria, layout, choice of main text, choice of variants, whether to emend and what to emend: these are just some of the considerations the modern editor applies to a saga text. In the case of the poetry, assuming for the moment that it is older than the prose, further considerations, to be discussed later in this chapter, are required, as later scribes may sometimes not have understood what they were copying and very often adapted the text to fit the linguistic or orthographical standards of their own day. Such editorial interventions inevitably affect the product offered to the reader or scholar, and may include the choice of a particular manuscript to use as main text (the foundation of the edition) if there is more than one manuscript version of that text available, as well as decisions about how to normalise the language of the text to a particular chronological standard and whether to exclude any part of it (as an interpolation, for example). Such editorial decisions can be crucial to a consideration of the relationship between the prose and poetic parts of saga texts, as there are cases in which different versions of the same saga contain more or less poetry than others.

[3] This was somewhat later than the earliest editions of *fornaldarsögur*, which became popular in Scandinavia and many other European lands in the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries. Some first editions of sagas of Icelanders with their dates and places of publication are *Njáls saga* (Copenhagen, 1772), *Gunnlaugs saga* (Copenhagen, 1775), *Egils saga* (Hrappsey, 1782) and *Eyrbyggja saga* (Copenhagen, 1787).

Similar considerations apply to editions of the poetry alone, extrapolated from its prose context, something that has been a long-standing convention of scholarship in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic studies, as witnessed by the standard editions of Finnur Jónsson and E. A. Kock, now followed by *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (*SkP*).[4] Such stand-alone editions still require their editors to weigh up the manuscript traditions and contexts that underpin the texts in which the poetry appears.

It is a valid working assumption that there is a considerable distance between a saga as the creation of a medieval author or authors and the textualisation of that product in the form of a manuscript or manuscripts, which are then further textualised by modern editors. Moreover, the initial medieval textualisation itself, which we cannot access directly except by inference from later textualisations, is generally assumed to have occurred as a process of transformation from orally transmitted narratives and poems to written texts. Scholars have made various attempts to understand how this process took place, but the modern consensus is that at some point in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century Icelanders began to put together continuous written narratives about the early settlers of their island, based on orally transmitted prose tales and poetry that had also been transmitted orally. Around the same time or earlier in some cases, other genres of saga literature, such as kings' sagas, contemporary sagas and *fornaldarsögur*, were also taking shape.[5]

Evidence in support of the existence already in the early twelfth century of some kind of oral performance that combined prose story-telling with poetry is provided by an account of the entertainment that took place at a wedding at Reykjahólar (modern Reykhólar) in Breiðafjörður in 1119.[6]

4 Finnur Jónsson's four-volume edition (*Skj* A I–II and B I–II) of the corpus of Old Norse skaldic poetry, extracted from all the major saga genres, has been the standard edition for the twentieth century and remains a key resource. E. A. Kock (ed.), *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2 vols (Lund, 1946–50) offers an alternative view to many of Finnur Jónsson's extensive emendations and less believable interpretations. It needs to be read in conjunction with Kock's *Notationes Norrænæ: Anteckningar till Edda och Skaldediktning*. Lunds Universitets årsskrift. New series, sec. 1 (Lund, 1923–44).

5 See Introduction and references there in footnote 6.

6 The evidence comes from *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* [The Saga of Þorgils and Hafliði], which is usually dated to the early thirteenth century. Mikael Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 113 (Berlin and Boston, 2020), ch. 4.1.2, pp. 201–4, has argued that the writer of *Þorgils saga* is likely to have projected his own understanding of how sagas were constituted and performed in his own day, the early thirteenth century, onto his material, leading to inaccuracies in the description of the various performance elements. Males therefore disputes that the Reykjahólar wedding description can be used as evidence for the existence of

Several saga-like entertainments are mentioned as having taken place there, including *fornaldarsaga*-like narratives with many stanzas (*ok margar vísur með*) about several legendary heroes, probably in eddic metres, and the saga of a tenth- or eleventh-century Hebridean poet, Ormr Barreyjarskáld [Poet of Barra], told by a priest named Ingimundr. This saga is said to have included many stanzas and a good *flokkr*, a long poem without a refrain, towards the end of the saga, which Ingimundr had composed himself: 'Ingimundr prestr sagði sǫgu Orms [B]arreyjarskálds ok vísur margar ok flokk góðan við enda sǫgunnar, er Ingimundr hafði ortan ….'[7] [Ingimundr the priest recited the saga of Ormr Barreyjarskáld with many verses and a good *flokkr* towards the end of the saga, which Ingimundr had composed …].

A question that arises in the context of the Reykjahólar narrative is whether medieval audiences accepted the poetry in sagas of Icelanders (as distinct from poetry in *fornaldarsögur*) as truthful, authentic either in the primary sense of the word or in the secondary sense of verisimilitude. Did they accept all of the poetry as the work of skalds of a past age or were they aware of differences between one poem or stanza and another? If they did perceive such differences, were they able to account for them in analytical terms or did they rather accept them, perhaps somewhat uncritically, as part of the entertainment provided by the oral performance of a saga text?

It is difficult to answer such questions because there is little contemporary evidence for medieval audiences' reception of sagas and the poetry within them. However, the Reykjahólar narrative, though written probably at least one hundred years later than the event, clearly distinguishes between poetry (*margar vísur* [many stanzas]) about Ormr Barreyjarskáld[8] in his saga, which might have been Ormr's own work and were probably in a skaldic verse-form, and the *flokkr* towards the end of the prose narrative that Ingimundr the priest, the performer of the narrative as a whole, is said to have composed himself. This distinction indicates that the author of *Þorgils saga*, at least, recognised that, while some poetry cited in sagas might be attributable to the saga protagonists, other parts of the whole were the work of the person telling the story. The Reykjahólar narrative thus cautions us against assuming that medieval Icelanders were unable to discriminate between authentically

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saga-like narratives combining prose and verse in the early twelfth century. While this argument is difficult to disprove, the level of detail in the narrative about the performers and the works performed makes Males' contention unlikely.

7 Ursula Brown (ed.), *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* (Oxford, 1952), p. 18.

8 Ormr Barreyjarskáld from Barra, an island in the Outer Hebrides, did exist as an historical person. Two fragments of poems by him (OBarr Frag 1–2[III]) are quoted in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. His saga, which Ingimundr the priest is said to have recited, must have belonged to the sub-group we now call sagas of poets (*skáldasögur*).

old poetry composed by known poets of a former age and poetry composed about them at a later date by talented narrators. The same narrative indicates that 'stanzas could be credited with aesthetic or entertainment value as a part of the saga narrative'.[9] They, or at least some of them, would therefore very likely be considered authentic in terms of verisimilitude rather than in terms of historical fact.

Preben Meulengracht Sørensen suggests[10] that there may have been something of a debate around the time the first sagas of Icelanders were being composed about the truth value of the poetry cited within them. In support of this idea, he mentions the Preface to *Heimskringla* [Circle of the world], probably composed by Snorri Sturluson c. 1230,[11] which sets out the kind of poetry Snorri considered reliable as a source of historical information, and so authentic in that sense. Snorri restricts reliable sources to court poetry composed and recited in the presence of living rulers or their descendants and does not mention the sort of poetry found in sagas of Icelanders, which, by implication, he would not have considered historically reliable.

Another pointer to medieval Icelandic attitudes to the authenticity of sagas and the poetry quoted within them comes from a consideration of the terms used in Old Norse to refer to the process of written composition. Lars Lönnroth[12] drew attention some years ago to the way in which Old Icelandic writers referred to the process of saga composition by means of the phrasal verb *setja saman*, literally 'to put together', meaning to bring various existing elements together to make a new whole.[13] He saw this Old Norse expression

9 Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 172–90, at p. 184. The saga author endorses the entertainment value of the Reykjahólar performance when he comments (Brown (ed.) *Þorgils saga*, p. 18): 'En þessarri sǫgu var skemt Sverri konungi, ok kallaði hann slíkar lygisǫgur skemtiligastar' [And King Sverrir [of Norway, r. 1177–1202] was entertained with this saga and he called such lying sagas the most amusing].

10 *Loc. cit*.

11 *ÍF* 26, pp. 3–4.

12 Lars Lönnroth, 'European Sources of Icelandic Saga-Writing. An Essay Based on Previous Studies' (Stockholm, 1965). Repr. in his *The Academy of Odin. Selected Papers on Old Norse Literature*. The Viking Collection 19 (Odense, 2011), pp. 13–23, at p. 16.

13 See Johan Fritzner (ed.), *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*. 3 vols (Kristiania [Oslo], 1883–96), III, *setja* 8 – *saman*: 'sammensætte, af flere Dele istandbringe noget' [compile, bring something together from several parts]. Cf. the rubric introducing the Uppsala manuscript of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, in Heimir Pálsson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson. The Uppsala Edda* (University College London,

as a probable translation of the Latin verb *componere* [to put together, collect, collate]. In Latin *componere* can be used of the process of composing a poem or writing a book, but it, like the Icelandic *setja saman*, does not focus on the author's creative faculty but rather presents him as authoring a work made out of diverse existing components, as in fact medieval writers must often have done when compiling sagas of Icelanders and other works. Hence it is likely that the resultant *prosimetrum* in sagas of Icelanders would have been considered by medieval audiences as the natural product of a process of bringing together diverse elements to make a new whole, some historically authentic, others perhaps not, with relatively little attention being paid to the nature of the work's fictionality.[14]

The conventional default position for modern editors of sagas on the authenticity issue (and most literary scholars have been guided by their views) has been to consider the poetry in sagas of Icelanders authentic, by which they mean 'composed when the saga says it was', that is, in the Settlement Age or during the early eleventh century, unless it can be proved or strongly suspected to be otherwise. They are thus initially accepting of the prevailing assumption induced by the historical context laid down in these sagas that this poetry, in the main, was composed and uttered by men and women whose historical existence lay in the tenth or early eleventh centuries. It is only when modern empirical scepticism is aroused by doubts about the likelihood of composition by young children (for example, Egill Skalla-Grímsson's juvenilia), by women (as a majority of scholars have supposed), by inanimate objects or supernatural beings, or where anachronisms, inconsistencies between prose and verse, linguistic and/or metrical irregularities appear in the texts indicating a later date of composition, that editors and commentators

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2012), pp. 6–7: 'Bók þessi heitir Edda. Hana hefir saman setta Snorri Sturluson eptir þeim hætti sem hér er skipat' [This book is called Edda. Snorri Sturluson has compiled it in the manner in which it is arranged here].

14 The question of when the concept of fictionality came into being and was applied to literary works in medieval Iceland is also a difficult one. In the same article cited in footnote 11 above ('European Sources', p. 16), Lönnroth argues that 'a clear distinction between [historical works, such as biographies and chronicles] and fictional prose did not exist at this time in Iceland any more than in the rest of Europe' and that it was not until the later Middle Ages that, under the influence of the romance genre, purely fictional works, like some of the later *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, were appreciated. On the overt fictionality of these later genres, see Geraldine Barnes, *The Bookish Riddarasögur. Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland*. The Viking Collection 21 (Odense, 2014) and Ralph O'Connor 'Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 111 (2012), 474–512, where the evidence for self-conscious fictionality in Old Icelandic literature is reviewed on pp. 504–12.

have pronounced a good deal of the poetry in sagas of Icelanders inauthentic in the sense of unlikely to have been composed by an individual living in the tenth or early eleventh century. However, some scholars have adopted a much more sceptical position than this and have argued that a high proportion of the poetry in many sagas of Icelanders is likely to have been composed around the time that the prose texts were written and sometimes by the authors of the prose themselves.[15]

Authenticity of Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders: Current Research and Analysis

In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at the current state of scholarship on the authenticity question, specifically as it applies to poetry in sagas of Icelanders, and consider the new perspectives on the likely composition of these sagas that open up as a consequence of the application of a range of criteria for determining their authenticity. It is first necessary, however, to sound a note of caution. Like other forms of textual criticism, the assessment of the authenticity and age of Old Norse poetry is not an exact science.[16] It will probably never be possible to determine the age of many stanzas in these sagas in absolute terms or even sometimes within a specific time period. In some cases this is because the poetry in question contains no diagnostic criteria that can establish its age within a particular chronological range. In other instances the evidence may point in several directions, if the stanza or stanzas in question display some early dating features and others consistent with a later date of composition. For these and other reasons it is important to make judgements about the authenticity of a stanza or set of stanzas based on as numerous and varied a set of criteria as can appropriately be applied to them. It is also important that the sample of poetry chosen to test be sufficiently large to give an accurate result. Finally if the analysis of the corpus of poetry from sagas of Icelanders is to have scientific validity and avoid circularity of argument, the criteria used to determine authenticity need to be established in comparison with poetry from a separate corpus that can

15 This judgement has frequently been made about the poetry in *Gísla saga*, but has recently been challenged by Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 119 (2020), 220–57. Kari Ellen Gade, in her new edition of the poetry of Gísli in *SkP* V, offers a more nuanced view, discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

16 As A. E. Housman memorably stated in his essay 'The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', in A. E. Housman, ed. John Carter, *Selected Prose* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 131–50, repr. from *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, 18 (1922), 67–84.

be dated with reasonable certainty, and that in practice means the corpus of poetry from kings' sagas and historical compilations.

The available criteria for judging the age and authenticity of poetry in sagas of Icelanders are also of varying strength. They may be divided into two main categories, formal and contextual, with the former group generally more decisive than the latter. Included in the formal group are various linguistic criteria, such as rhymes which would have been archaic in the period after c. 1200 and metrical issues, including metres that were uncommon in the period before 1200, as well as metrical faults that suggest a late date of composition. Contextual criteria may include a consideration of the relationship between a particular stanza and its prose context in the saga or an anachronism occurring in a stanza, relating to a place, person or concept that is unlikely to have been current in the tenth or early eleventh centuries. Consideration in the contextual category may also be given to the ways in which clusters of stanzas are arranged in the prose text, a subject considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

Scholarship on the subject of the authenticity of poetry in sagas of Icelanders stretches back well into the nineteenth century, and many of the criteria discussed here were first formulated by scholars such as Konráð Gíslason and Finnur Jónsson and, in the twentieth century, by Hans Kuhn.[17] More recently the work of Kari Ellen Gade and Klaus Johan Myrvoll has revisited the main issues and developed a more stringent methodology for assessing the likely age of poetry, particularly that in the poets' sagas and in *Gísla saga*.[18] In writing this chapter I have drawn on their work and also brought together

[17] See, among other works, Konráð Gíslason, 'Om helrim i første og tredje linie af regelmassige "dróttkvætt" og "hrynhenda"'. Indbydelsesskrift til Kjøbenhavns universitets aarsfest til erindring om kirkens reformation (Copenhagen, 1877); Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske kultur- og sprogforhold i 9. og 10. århundrede* (Copenhagen, 1921); Hans Kuhn, '*Das Fullwort* of-um *im Altwestnordischen: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der germanischen Präfixe: Ein Beitrag zur altgermanischen Metrik* (Göttingen, 1929); Hans Kuhn, 'Das Dróttkvættverse des Typs "brestr erfiði Austra"', in Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30. júní 1969* (Reykjavík, 1969), pp. 403–17; Hans Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt* (Heidelberg, 1983), pp. 258–63.

[18] Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*. Islandica 49 (Ithaca and London, 1995); Gade, 'The Dating and Attributions of Verses in the Skald Sagas', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2010), pp. 50–74 and her Introduction to the poetry in *Gísla saga* in Volume V of *SkP*; Klaus Johan Myrvoll 'Kronologi i skaldekvæde. Distribusjon av metriske og språklege drag i høve til tradisjonell datering og attribuering' (PhD dissertation, Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske stadium, Universitetet i Oslo, 2014) and 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse'.

the assessments of the various editors of the poetry in Volume V of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders* (*SkP* V) on the subject of the poetry's age and authenticity.

The linguistic analysis of poetic texts begins from a study of the manuscripts that copyists and redactors have bequeathed to posterity. Very often copyists of the poetry in saga texts misunderstood what they were copying and produced nonsensical words and phrases that modern editors have struggled to understand. They may also have normalised the poetry to fit the linguistic standards of their own day, thereby producing unmetrical lines which modern editors usually try to restore to regularity.[19] Thus some of the diagnostic characteristics that determine authenticity are often overlaid by later medieval modernisations or by textual corruption.

The following are the six most robust formal criteria indicative of an early date of composition of skaldic poetry, as agreed by linguists and metrical specialists. It is assumed here that the metre of the poetry in sagas of Icelanders is usually regular *dróttkvætt* [court metre], with a full stanza comprising eight lines of six syllables each, and having *aðalhending* [noble rhyme, chief (i.e. full internal) rhyme] in even lines and *skothending* [inserted rhyme, partial rhyme, assonance] in odd lines. Other metres sometimes appear in these sagas, including the eddic metres *fornyrðislag* [old story metre], *ljóðaháttr* [songs' form] and *málaháttr* [speeches' form], and there are a few examples of particular variants of *dróttkvætt*, such as *tvískelft* [twice trembled] (cf. *Eb* 22^{v}), which may sometimes provide evidence that can lend support to a particular dating made on other grounds.[20]

(a) In poetry judged to be from before c. 1150 some words (usually termed hiatus words) had a sequence of two vowels that were later either contracted to a single vowel or underwent an accent shift, producing a desyllabification of the first vowel and a lengthening of the second. Manuscript witnesses have sometimes preserved the disyllabic forms of these words, but (more often) they have failed to preserve them yet show that they must be restored

19 The most frequent types of modernisation include the conversion of cliticised verbs, conjunctions and pronouns to free-standing ones (e.g. *þás* to *þá er*, *skalk* to *skal ek*), the addition of free-standing personal pronouns, the replacement of the suffixed negation *–a*(*t*) by the negations *eigi* or *ei*, and the addition to nouns and adjectives of the enclitic definite article.

20 For example, the use of *hálfhnept* in one stanza only (*Eb* 30) of the seven attributed in *Eyrbyggja saga* to Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi arouses suspicion of spuriousness partly on the ground of the sudden change from *dróttkvætt* to the uncommon metre *hálfhnept*, and partly because the subject matter of the stanza repeats some of the key words of the previous stanza, *Eb* 29. See *Eb* 30, Note to [All] where a parallel is drawn with a similar instance of change of metre in *Gísl* 20–1, where the second of the two stanzas is also likely to be spurious.

because the lines of poetry in which the forms occur are otherwise hypometrical.[21] An example here is *Korm* 19/8 *linns, þjóðáar rinna* [of fire, mighty rivers run], in which the compound noun *þjóðáar* 'mighty rivers' is spelled 'þioðár' in the only manuscript, Möðruvallabók (M), but where the second element, *áar* [rivers], must be rendered as disyllabic because otherwise the line would be one syllable too short. In the same line we have an example of another early feature, the earlier form *rinna* of the verb *renna* [run], which is modernised in M's *renna*, but must have the earlier form restored to form a full rhyme (*aðalhending*) with *linn-* in the even, eighth line of a *dróttkvætt* stanza (see point (f) below). Older forms of personal names are often preserved in early verse; an example in *Egils saga* where the manuscripts have retained the disyllabic form of the personal name *Bárðr* as 'baruðr' is *Eg* 8/8 *Bárøðr – hugar fári* [Bárðr – of your mind the danger], where the line would be too short without the older form, although the very next stanza (*Eg* 9/8) requires the more modern form, in *ǫl, þats Bárðr of signdi* [ale, that Bárðr consecrated].[22]

(b) There are numerous other forms of words that would have been archaic by the early thirteenth century to be found in poetry in sagas of Icelanders. If these can be confirmed by full rhyme (*aðalhending*), which usually occurs in even lines of a *dróttkvætt* stanza, their presence strengthens the case for the pre-1200 dating of a poetic corpus. The example above of *linn-* : *rinn-* is a case in point, and exactly the same rhyme between these two elements occurs at *Glúm* 11/2 *þremjalinns at rinna* [of the snake of edges to run],[23] where the main manuscript (M) has retained the earlier *rinna*.

(c) The presence of the expletive particle *of* (later *um*) in Old Norse poetry before preterites and past participles of verbs, also before infinitives and sometimes before nouns, as in the late ninth-century *Ragnarsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Ragnarr] by Bragi Boddason (Bragi *Rdr* 3/8^{III} *harma Erps of barmar* [injuries Erpr's brothers]), has been much studied, first by Kuhn and later by Fidjestøl and others.[24] The statistical evidence is clear that,

21 On hiatus words, see Bjarne Fidjestøl, ed. Odd Einar Haugen, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry*. *A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*. Bibliotheca Arnamagæana 41 (Copenhagen, 1999), pp. 246–59; see also *ANG* §§130–5; on *rinna*, see *ANG* §§162.1, 495 and Anm. 2.

22 Mikael Males, 'Egill och Kormákr – tradering och nydiktning', *Maal og minne*, 103 (2011), 115–46, at pp. 129–30, has argued that the more modern form of the name in *Eg* 9 indicates that this stanza is a later addition to the saga text. The line in question is also without the expected *aðalhending*, but it does include the enclitic *of*, so the dating evidence points in more than one direction.

23 *Linnr* is used here in its customary poetic sense of 'serpent, snake', whereas in *Korm* 19/8, cited above, it has the uncommon transferred sense of 'fire'.

24 See Hans Kuhn, *Das Fullwort of-um im Altnordischen* and Bjarne Fidjestøl,

although the particle *of* still occurs sometimes in manuscripts from c. 1250, its presence is much greater in poetry judged on other grounds to be early. The particle *of* rarely appears before infinitives and nouns after the beginning of the eleventh century.

(d) The observation that full rhymes (*aðalhendingar*) between *a* : *ǫ* occur in poetry from before c. 1200 but not later than that was first made by Konráð Gíslason in 1887, was subsequently confirmed by Finnur Jónsson[25] and fully explained phonologically by Hreinn Benediktsson in 1963.[26] Hreinn showed that in the period before c. 1200 there was a structural affinity between *a* and *ǫ* in the Old Icelandic vowel system that was lost about that time, when *ǫ* became *ö*. The presence of *a* : *ǫ* rhymes is usually considered a reliable indicator of pre-1200 composition in Old Norse poetry, particularly if it is backed up by other diagnostic features. An example is *Glúm* 5/4^{v} *dyn-Njǫrðr mik* of *barðan* [noise-Njǫrðr me struck], with *aðalhending* between *Njǫrð-* and *barð-*.[27]

(e) Hans Kuhn proposed in 1969 that lines of a certain type, exemplified by Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson's *Þorfinnsdrápa*'s *brestr erfiði Austra* [will split the toil of Austri <dwarf>] (Arn *Þorfdr* 24/3^{II}), were introduced into the skaldic repertoire as an innovation and that this innovation, possibly occasioned by poets' difficulties in incorporating the place-name *Hringmaraheiðr* [Ringmere Heath] into their stanzas, can be dated precisely to the years around 1010, when a battle at this location probably took place.[28] Lines of this type carry internal rhyme on the first, unstressed syllable preceding the first alliterating syllable. Kuhn found only three examples in poetry considered on other grounds to be earlier than 1010–14 that he claimed follow this pattern, one of them in *Egils saga* (*Eg* 69/1 *nýtr illsǫgull ýtir* [exploits the ill-speaking launcher]). The implication is that such lines are likely to be inauthentic, and there are other pointers to that status in stanza 69 of *Egils saga*. It contains at least one other indication of later features (l. 8 *svágǫru*) and is one of several cited in the prose text as part of an adventure Egill undertakes in the Swedish

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Dating of Eddic Poetry, especially the comparative table on p. 215.

25 See Konráð Gíslason, 'Om helrim', pp. 9–10 and Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske kultur- og sprogforhold i 9. og 10. århundrede*, p. 243.

26 Hreinn Benediktsson, 'Phonemic Neutralization and Inaccurate Rhymes', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 26 (1963), 1–18, repr. in his *Linguistic Studies, Historical and Comparative*, ed. Guðrún Þórhallsdóttir *et al.* (Reykjavík, 2002), pp. 92–104.

27 In this example, the *of* in *of barðan* [struck] is an emendation, with the manuscript (M) reading *barðan* alone, but the lost *of* is required for the line to be metrical, so this example is also an instance of criterion (c), the expletive particle with a past participle.

28 Hans Kuhn, 'Das Dróttkvættverse des Typs "brestr erfiði Austra"'. Gade, 'Dating and Attribution', pp. 66–8 applies this criterion to the poets' sagas. On the battle at Ringmere Heath, see Ótt *Hfl* 9/3^{I} and Note and ÞKolb *Eirdr* 15/7^{I} and Note.

province of Värmland. A number of indications suggest this episode in the saga may be a later addition to the text.

(f) Another formal element of skaldic poetry that may contribute to the determination of authenticity is the distribution of rhymes, called *hendingar* [literally 'catchings'], within stanzas. In regular *dróttkvætt* after c. 1050 *skothending* or half-rhyme occurs in odd lines and *aðalhending* or full rhyme in even ones. In very early *dróttkvætt* texts, such as Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* and Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Haustlǫng* [Autumn Long], the occurrence of *skothending* in odd lines is irregular, but *aðalhending* is usually found at least in lines 4 and 8, and sometimes also in lines 2 and 6. By the end of the tenth century *aðalhending* is normally the rule in all even lines, so its absence may suggest corruption or alteration on the part of a later redactor, while *skothending* usually achieved regularity in odd lines by the mid-eleventh century.[29]

The formal criteria of authenticity listed above are by no means the only ones that can be brought into play in attempting to date stanzas of Old Norse poetry. On the other side of the coin, there are many formal indications that some poetry in sagas of Icelanders is of a date later than the tenth or early eleventh centuries, that is, later than the time when the saga protagonists are said to have lived and composed the poetry attributed to them. Such features may indicate that a stanza or set of stanzas is likely to have been reworked by a later redactor or that it was a wholly new creation by someone who added either poetry or both poetry and prose to an existing set of narratives that came to form a written saga. In some sagas that probably came into being in the fourteenth century it is likely that the poetry and the prose text were composed by one and the same person.

An example showing the kinds of indicators of late composition found in poetry in sagas probably dating from the fourteenth century is a stanza from *Harðar saga Grímkelssonar*. The stanza (*Harð* 2) is spoken by Hǫrðr's mother, Signý Valbrandsdóttir, just after her ill-fated three-year-old son has stumbled while taking his very first steps and broken her valuable necklace.

> Braut í sundr fyr sætu Gangr varð ei góðr ins unga
> Sírnis hljóða men góða; gulls lystis inn fysti;
> ýta, trú ek, at engi bæti hverr mun heðan af verri;
> auðs hlíði þat síðan. hnefstr mun þó inn efsti.

[29] Males, 'Egill och Kormákr', argues that irregular *hendingar* in some stanzas of both *Egils saga* and *Kormáks saga* are deliberate archaisms. He has repeated and extended this claim in *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*, ch. 4.3–4.7, pp. 219–73. Given that several of the stanzas he analyses are irregular for other reasons, it is difficult to assess how likely this feature is to be deliberately archaising. In his investigations it should be noted that he confines his analyses to a small number of metrical criteria (*hendingar* and metrical fillers) and does not consider other linguistic issues.

> Braut í sundr góða men hljóða Sírnis fyr sætu; trú ek, at engi ýta* bæti hlíði auð*s* þat síðan. Inn fysti gangr ins unga lystis gulls varð ei góðr; hverr mun heðan af verri; inn efsti mun þó hnefstr.
>
> He broke the good necklace of Sírnir's <giant's> speeches [GOLD] into pieces before the woman. I believe that no man can compensate the slope of wealth [WOMAN] for that afterwards. The first step of the young desirer of gold [MAN = Hǫrðr] was not good; each one from here on will be worse; yet the last will be the poorest.

As we will see in Chapter 7 on sagas from after c. 1280 the attribution of poetry to female characters becomes more frequent then, as does the practice of giving protagonists stanzas to speak at high points of tension in the narrative, wherein they reveal their inner feelings. In both these respects this stanza is typical of poetry in sagas of Icelanders from the fourteenth century. However, there are numerous technical indicators of late composition within the stanza itself, particularly of a metrical kind. It is composed in an irregular *dróttkvætt* metre, with lines 2, 5 and 7 being unmetrical. Line 3 is actually in a different metre, *hrynhent* [flowing rhymed], popular in poetry composed after c. 1300 and very common in late Icelandic poetry with Christian subjects. This mixture of metres also appears in other stanzas of *Harðar saga* (*Harð* 15 and 17) and suggests that whoever composed its poetry might have been more at home with *hrynhent* than *dróttkvætt*.

There are various other late indicators in this stanza. In line 6 the *aðalhending* between *lyst-* and *fyst-* (instead of *fyrst-* [first]) shows the fourteenth-century assimilation of the consonant combination <rs> to <ss>, while in line 8 the full rhyme between *hnefst-* (ms. 'hnestr') and *efst-* shows the similarly dated assimilation of <ps> to <fs>.[30] Other indicators are the woman-*heiti sæta* (line 1), common in fourteenth-century poetry, the unprecedented choice of the personal name Sírnir (line 2) as a giant-*heiti* in a gold-kenning and the free-standing negative particle *ei* 'not' in line 5.

Stanzas that contain metrical faults or licences that are unknown or rare in poetry that is presumed to be early raise questions of authenticity,[31] as does the use of metrical types in purportedly early poetry that are rare before

30 On the former criterion, see *ANG* §272.3 and, on the latter, *ANG* §247.

31 So Gade, 'Dating and Attribution', p. 68. The presence of breaches of Craigie's law, which do not normally appear in poetry before the fourteenth century, is a strong indicator of inauthenticity in poetry otherwise deemed early. This law, named after its proposer, Sir William Craigie, 'On Some Points in Skaldic Metre', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 16 (1900), 341–84, holds that even *dróttkvætt* lines in which metrical positions 1 and 2 are occupied by two stressed syllables cannot tolerate a long-stemmed nomen (a noun, adjective or infinitive) in metrical positions 3 or 4. An example of this violation from a poetic corpus presumed to

the twelfth century. A case in point is a stanza in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*Eb* 22) attributed to a Swedish *berserkr* named Leiknir. Apart from the improbability, if not ludicrousness, of such a character being able to compose skaldic poetry in such an elaborate and uncommon variant of *dróttkvætt* as *tvískelft* [twice trembled], which is the metre of this stanza, most of the few other extant examples of regular *tvískelft* are from poems of the twelfth century or later.[32]

In the case of Leiknir's stanza there are also contextual reasons to doubt its status as a stanza composed in the tenth century. It is one of three stanzas, all showing indications of post-tenth century composition, included in an episode of *Eyrbyggja saga* that bears all the marks of being a distinctive and once independent narrative about how Arngrímr (Víga-Styrr) Þorgrímsson, acting on the advice of his kinsman Snorri *goði*, got rid of two troublesome Swedish berserks, one of whom wanted to marry his daughter, by overheating a sauna from which they were forced to escape to their deaths.[33] This narrative and some accompanying stanzas were also known to the compiler of *Heiðarvíga saga*, but they were unfortunately in the part of that saga that was burnt in the Copenhagen fire of 1728 and now only exists in a précis recalled from memory by the copyist Jón Ólafsson. However, Jón remembered that there were several stanzas in the narrative, one of which was certainly a version of the stanza attributed to the second Swedish berserk, Halli, in *Eyrbyggja saga* as *Eb* 21.

Joseph Harris has shown that the underlying narrative of the episode of Víga-Styrr [Killer-Styr] and the Swedish berserks belongs to a folk-tale type also exemplified in Snorri Sturluson's account in the *Gylfaginning* section of his *Edda* of how the Æsir gods thwarted the ambitions of a giant builder to subvert their society and steal the goddess Freyja and the sun and moon.[34] It seems likely that the story of Víga-Styrr and the berserks may have been one of those originally independent narratives that were incorporated into two sagas, both of which included material concerning the activities of Víga-Styrr. If the three extant stanzas in *Eyrbyggja saga* (and there were possibly more than three in the original *Heiðarvíga saga*) are compositions

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be early is *BjH* 33/4 *randóps, þærs hlýrn skǫpu**. The stanza in which this line appears contains other indicators of inauthenticity or corruption.

32 There are some examples of *tvískelft* in Hallvarðr háreksblesi's *Knútsdrápa* [*Drápa* for Knútr (the Great)] (Hallv *Knútdr*^{III}), dated c. 1029. The variant is exemplified by Snorri Sturluson in stanza 28 of *Háttatal* [Enumeration of Verse-forms] (SnSt *Ht* 28^{III}); see Note to [All] there and *SnE* 2007, 81.

33 *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 28, *ÍF* 4, pp. 70–5.

34 Joseph Harris, 'The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri's *Edda* and Two Sagas', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 91 (1976), 66–101. For the *Snorra Edda* text, see *SnE* 2005, pp. 34–6; Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Snorri Sturluson Edda* (London and Rutland, Vermont, 1987), pp. 35–6.

of early thirteenth-century date, as seems likely, one can speculate that they were devised to add further spice to an already droll and memorable story.

The relationship between the poetry and the prose in saga *prosimetra* is the subject of the next chapter of this book, but it is mentioned here because it can contribute to a consideration of whether stanzas are likely to have been the compositions of the poets to whom they are attributed. It often happens that stanzas which many scholars have identified as inauthentic occur in episodic narratives within sagas of Icelanders that show signs of having once been independent tales.[35] Among them are *Eg* 66–71 of *Egils saga*, mentioned above in connection with lines of the *brestr erfiði Austra* type, and *Eg* 59–63 of the same saga, Egill's duel with Ljótr inn bleiki [the Pale].[36] In each case the narratives are essentially self-contained and include elements of a somewhat fantastical nature. Episodes of this kind also occur towards the end of most of the poets' sagas, at a point where, one suspects, the saga compilers were running low on authentic stories about their protagonists' final days. There is a general consensus that the two anonymous stanzas *Gunnl* 23–4 in *Gunnlaugs saga* describing visions of their dead sons, attributed to the fathers of Gunnlaugr and his rival Hrafn, are unlikely to have been part of the original saga. Likewise, the final four stanzas of *Kormáks saga* (*Korm* 82–5), purporting to relate to Kormákr's final encounter with a Scottish giant, are so full of inconsistencies and improbabilities that they are very unlikely to have formed part of the original *vita* of Kormákr Qgmundarson.[37] The final stanzas of *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* (from *BjH* 30 onwards) show clear instances of the probable influence of the dream stanzas from *Gísla saga*,[38] as well as

35 A similar point was made by Jakob Benediktsson, 'Versene i Landnámabók', *Gardar*, 6 (1975), 7–25, at p. 8, in an analysis of the poetry in *Landnámabók*, much of which is connected to originally independent narratives.

36 See Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative*. Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 8 (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1991), pp. 173–81.

37 This episode is discussed further in Chapter 4 below. It is very likely that other stanzas from the final part of *Kormáks saga* are also spurious; Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature*, ch. 4.5, pp. 244–51, points the finger at *Korm* 77–9 as well as *Korm* 82; see also Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'Kronologi i skaldekvæde', pp. 122–5. The new edition of these stanzas in *SkP* V supports these suspicions on the basis of several kinds of evidence (see Sub-Introductions and Notes to these stanzas there). The stanzas are metrically irregular, with a preference for otherwise rare even Type B- and C-lines (*Korm* 78–9, 82–5), many lines having no rhyme. It is probable that some or all these stanzas were composed by the same person, who lived much later than the historical Kormákr Qgmundarson.

38 Compare *BjH* 34 and *Gísl* 24–5 (as well as Anon *Krm* 29/2^{VIII}) and *BjH* 38/6 and *Gunnl* 24/6. In the latter case the direction of influence is not clear.

various other indicators of late composition, and must be regarded as the likely work of a thirteenth-century compiler.

Towards a Conclusion

As we have seen, the concept of authenticity is to some extent a relative matter and requires special nuancing in the case of sagas of Icelanders. When we apply the various criteria described in this chapter to these sagas as individual entities, it is necessary to weigh up all the evidence available before pronouncing on individual stanzas and the work as a whole, and even then, one's final assessment is really a matter of judgement dependent on relative probabilities. It is also necessary to consider whether some or all of the formal criteria that have been taken to identify presumably early poetry could instead be the product of archaising poetasters of a later period, who had worked out how to make poetry look old and had applied their skills to creating stanzas of their own composition or that of their contemporaries. This idea, which was invoked particularly by mid-twentieth-century scholars such as Gabriel Turville-Petre and Peter Foote,[39] who doubted the authenticity of the poetry in *Gísla saga* as the work of the historical Gísli, has been revived more recently in a different form by those who see a major intellectual impetus towards the creation of prosimetrical sagas to lie in the undoubted increase of interest in the formal language of Icelandic poetry that seems to have begun in the mid-twelfth century, extending into the thirteenth. As I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, the argument here builds on a hypothesis originally proposed by Guðrún Nordal,[40] that in Icelandic schools the teaching of *grammatica*, the basis of a Latin education, may have been illustrated with examples from Icelandic skaldic poetry as well as from Latin

39 Gabriel Turville-Petre, 'Gísli Súrsson and His Poetry: Traditions and Influences', in *Nine Norse Studies* (University College London, 1972), pp. 118–53, repr. From *Modern Language Review*, 39 (1944), 374–91, and Peter G. Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gísli and its Icelandic Background', in George Johnston (trans.), *The Saga of Gísli* (London, 1963), pp. 93–134, at pp. 113–23.

40 Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy. The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001), p. 24: '[The First Grammatical Treatise's familiarity with and knowledge of skaldic verse might] imply that skaldic art was systematically used to illustrate grammatical definitions, and was therefore studied, under the auspices of grammatica, in Icelandic schools perhaps as early as the twelfth century, which would explain the great esteem it enjoyed from learned laymen and clergy alike. Skaldic verse-making would have been part of their standard education and shaped their sense of style and language. If this contention is tenable, skaldic verse would possibly have been an integral part of the intellectual training of Icelandic students.'

texts. If Icelandic students, many of them destined for the priesthood, had become adept at analysing the language of skaldic verse in school, might they not have extended those skills to the task of recreating archaic poetry and inserting it into the new prosimetrical mode of saga composition?[41]

The burden of proof in the case of the argument that archaic formal elements of skaldic poetry were often deliberately fabricated lies with those who wish to demonstrate it. There is also a distinction to be drawn between deliberate and regular archaisation and the *ad hoc* revision and reworking of orally transmitted poetry and prose that most scholars agree is likely to have taken place in many instances before or at the time when that poetry was placed within a prose context. The principal objection to the idea of extensive archaisation of poetry in sagas of Icelanders is that it is unlikely that even the most knowledgeable thirteenth-century practitioners could have introduced archaisms consistently and correctly, because to have done so would have required them to have understood the unstated linguistic and metrical rules upon which such archaic practices were based. As Einar Ólafur Sveinsson observed apropos just one of the formal criteria of early poetry in *Kormáks saga*, 'I know of no instances to show that men understood the nature or history of the full rhyme with *a* : *ǫ*, and its appearance in *Kormaks saga* is a riddle if the verses were composed in the thirteenth century'.[42]

It is unlikely that even sophisticated students of skaldic poetry, like Snorri Sturluson and Óláfr Þórðarson, authors of the *Edda* and the *Third Grammatical Treatise* respectively, understood the linguistic rules governing this and other archaic features of earlier Icelandic poetry. Even though their treatises show that they were fully aware of some of the differences between older and younger poetry, they usually explain them in terms of medieval etymologising or along the lines of interpretations offered in the grammatical and rhetorical manuals of their own day, and not in terms of modern linguistic analysis.[43] Further, when we look at the practices of medieval Icelandic

41 So Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Poetry*, ch. 4, *Prosimetrical Narrative*, pp. 244–51. His argument is more wide-ranging than this, however, and concerns the development of the prosimetrical form as a whole, though his main emphasis is upon that found in sagas of Icelanders.

42 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Kormakr the Poet and his Verses', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 17 (1966–9), 18–60, at p. 41. See also Gade, 'Dating and Attribution', pp. 65, 71. Gade makes the further point (p. 65) that one would also expect to find in archaising poetry of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century 'features consistent with thirteenth-century poetic conventions, that is, metrical types peculiar to later centuries'.

43 The exception here is the anonymous First Grammarian, whose treatise has attracted the attention of modern linguists on account of its methodological comparability to twentieth-century structural linguistics; see Hreinn Benediktsson (ed. and trans.), *The First Grammatical Treatise*, pp. 35–8.

scribes, faced with earlier poetic texts, what is most striking about them is the extent to which they modernise the older texts, thereby introducing metrical and linguistic problems which editors usually correct back to an earlier standard. Rarely, if ever, do they archaise their exemplars, though they sometimes copy forms of words that would have been outdated in their own day.

The argument for archaisation has mainly been applied to the poetry in the earliest of the sagas of Icelanders, those listed in **Table 3** of Chapter 1. This is partly because scholars want to explain how saga *prosimetrum* came about in the first place and partly because these sagas contain a high proportion of poetry in comparison with prose, although it should be noted that there are four sagas of this group (*Ljósvetninga saga*, *Reykdœla saga* (with one *helmingr* also in *Víga-Glúms saga*), *Valla-Ljóts saga* and *Vápnfirðinga saga*) that contain no poetry at all. By contrast, sagas from the mid-thirteenth century (as in **Table 4** of Chapter 1) do not, with a few exceptions, contain a great deal of verse. The apparent return to popularity of poetry in sagas of Icelanders during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (as in **Table 5** of Chapter 1) has not so far attracted much analysis, but it is not very fertile ground for the archaisation theory, as much of the poetry in texts of this period reveals plentiful evidence of late composition and makes little or no attempt to disguise it.[44]

The findings of the editors of the poetry from sagas of the earliest period in Volume V of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* on the whole support the position that much of this poetry can be assigned to the period before 1200, making it earlier than the prose texts that provide the frame for the *prosimetrum*, and that some of it probably dates from the period before 1015. However, it is not possible to prove such claims conclusively, and there are undoubtedly some stanzas and groups of stanzas, even within the earliest sagas, that are likely to have been later additions, whether by the saga authors themselves, or by individuals who collected and may have written down poetry attributed to saga characters at some time between c. 1050 and the thirteenth century.

With the exception of some stanzas (*BjH* 30 and 32) towards the end of *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, which arguably show signs of influence from *Gísla saga* (*Gísl* 25, 35–8), both that and two other early poets' sagas,

44 A probable exception to this generalisation is the practice of the composer of the poetry of *Víglundar saga*. According to Klaus Johan Myrvoll's edition in *SkP* V (see Introduction there), this late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century poet may have been attempting to imitate early skaldic rhyme patterns, including the use of 'compensatory rhymes' instead of regular *skothendingar* and other stylistic features, such as the extensive use of half-kennings for women (on these see Chapter 6).

Hallfreðar saga and *Kormáks saga*, probably comprise a majority of early stanzas (pre-1014), although there are several clusters of stanzas with accompanying prose in *Kormáks saga* that are highly likely to have been additions to the core narrative (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of this point). *Fóstbrœðra saga* too, whose main focus is upon the skald Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason, seems to have been built up, according to its most recent editor, R. D. Fulk, mainly on the basis of its existing poetry. Another saga of a poet, Egill Skalla-Grímsson, contains more poetry than any other saga of Icelanders, although the count is reduced if the long poems, *Hǫfuðlausn*, *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, are excluded as unlikely to have been part of the saga's earliest version. Some stanzas and stanza clusters in *Egils saga* have aroused suspicion of being later insertions into the saga text, as mentioned above. They are almost all contained within distinct episodes of the prose saga and present several diagnostic signs of having been composed well after the tenth century.

The remaining sagas from the period 1200–50 are *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga*. Neither *Droplaugarsona saga* nor *Víga-Glúms saga* has occasioned much recent discussion about the authenticity of its poetry, although the former's latest editor, Richard Perkins, has argued that the author of the prose text may have misplaced most of the stanzas through misunderstanding their content, and there is doubt about *Glúm* 1, though not about the majority of the remaining stanzas in *Víga-Glúms saga*, because it contains a line (line 5) of the type *brestr erfiði Austra*, rare before 1015. In the cases of both *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*, there is strong support for the early date of the poetry they contain in authenticating mode (*Illugadrápa* and *Hrafnsmál* in *Eyrbyggja saga*; the stanzas of Eiríkr viðsjá, Gestr Þórhallsson and Tindr Hallkelsson in *Heiðarvíga saga*), but some doubt about the age of some of the situational verses in both sagas, as has been mentioned above in connection with the episode of Víga-Styrr and the two Swedish berserks.[45] The consensus of current editorial opinion about the overlapping stories of Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson (*Eyrbyggja saga*) and Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi Arngeirsson (*Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*) and their poetry is that they are best treated as the products of oral narratives about men with similar names and love affairs, whose variants found a home in each of the two sagas rather than being the result of literary influence from one saga to the other.

It is difficult to generalise about the authenticity of poetry recorded in sagas of Icelanders from the period between 1250 and 1280 (see **Table 4**). With the exception of works such as *Bergbúa þáttr*, that show an interest

[45] See the remarks of Sigurður Nordal in *ÍF* 3, pp. cxli–cxliii on the subject of the authenticity of *Heiðarvíga saga* poetry and of Einar Ól. Sveinsson in *ÍF* 4, pp. v–xi on *Eyrbyggja saga* stanzas.

in the supernatural and fantastic world (looking forward to sagas such as *Grettis saga*) and belong more to the narrative type of the *þáttr* rather than the family saga, the chief examples of *prosimetrum* in this group are *Gísla saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*. All other texts from this period, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Laxdœla saga*, contain very little poetry, while *Hrafnkels saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* contain no verse. In Chapter 1 it was suggested that the incorporation of poetry into saga texts may have fallen out of fashion in these decades, possibly as a consequence of some intellectuals' doubts about its authenticity and value as a historical source. *Eiríks saga rauða* and its three stanzas are now considered to be largely fictional and influenced by contemporary geographical conceptions of exotic places. Whoever compiled *Laxdœla saga* was clearly aware of and interested in skaldic poetry, as he mentions several poems and their composers, but fails to quote any of them (see **Table 7a** in Chapter 2). However, his sole quotation of poetry involves snippets of verse, mainly about supernatural events, with the exception of one stanza (*Laxd* 3^{v}) that, together with the snippets, probably derives from the lost saga of Þorgils Hǫlluson. It is as if this author admits poetry into his text only in connection with interpolated material that he does not vouch for (see further Chapter 4).

Gunnlaugs saga, usually dated 1270–80, is best regarded as a pastiche of the skald saga type. It combines a number of the topics found in the earlier skald sagas, including dreams, love of a poet for a woman and rivalry with another poet for her affection, as well as service at the courts of various foreign rulers and samples of the poetry composed for them. While some of the poetry may be authentic, most scholars regard the bulk of it as unlikely to have been composed by the historical Gunnlaugr ormstunga 'Serpent-tongue' Illugason, who would have died c. 1010. One stanza, *Gunnl* 20, is a duplicate of *Korm* 3, and most scholars accept *Gunnlaugs saga* as the borrower there, while *Gunnl* 12 echoes *Gísl* 32 and 36. There are also many echoes in the poetry of *Gunnlaugs saga* of lines from poetry in other, earlier sagas, as Gade has demonstrated.[46] Aside from one *helmingr* by Gunnlaugr (*Gunnl* 19/1–4) quoted in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*[47] there is no citation of his poetry in any other source. Diana Whaley's Introduction to the edition of Gunnlaugr's poetry in Volume V of *SkP* summarises the case for and against the authenticity of his corpus.

The conventional dating of *Gísla sa*ga is c. 1250.[48] The question of the authenticity of the forty stanzas within it has been, and continues to be, one

46 Gade, 'Dating and Attribution', pp. 72–3, especially the Table on p. 73.

47 *SnE* 1998, I, p. 63.

48 For a review of the dating of *Gísla saga*, see Emily Lethbridge, 'Dating the Sagas and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*', in Else Mundal (ed.), *Dating the Sagas: Reviews and Revisions* (Copenhagen, 2013), pp. 77–113.

of the most disputed in saga studies and is unlikely ever to be fully resolved. However, both the saga itself and its poetry occupy a key position in the development of *Íslendingasaga prosimetrum*, so it is important to arrive at some kind of assessment of how and when this work is likely to have been put together. The forty stanzas can be divided roughly in half; on the one side are what Kari Ellen Gade calls 'factual' stanzas,[49] which are incorporated into the prose text to corroborate events in the saga narrative; on the other side are the six sequences of dream stanzas, twenty in all, recorded in the saga after Gísli's outlawry has been imposed. These stanzas detail the disturbing dreams in which he encounters and has dialogue with a good and a bad dream-woman.

The majority of earlier scholars and editors were of the opinion that most of the poetry in *Gísla saga* could not have been composed by the saga hero himself, pointing out that he was not known as a poet elsewhere in Icelandic tradition, and that a number of the dream stanzas are expressed in language of a pronouncedly Christian character, unlikely to have been composed before the middle of the twelfth century.[50] Indeed, the whole idea of his being counselled by both a good and a bad dream-woman has been evocative in the minds of many saga critics of Christian concepts of good and evil angels who act as an individual's guardians. There are also a good many discrepancies between some of the stanzas and the prose text into which they have been placed, leading scholars to doubt whether the saga author could have composed them.[51] However, as I will argue in Chapter 5, medieval Icelandic audiences seem to have tolerated such mismatches to a much greater extent than modern readers do, so this argument may not be as compelling as some others. A third position holds that the poetry in *Gísla saga* was composed neither by Gísli himself, nor by the saga author, but by an individual (or more likely several) who knew traditions about Gísli and composed stanzas about him at some time in the period before 1200, a *terminus ante quem* indicated by linguistic and metrical forms within the texts.

Two scholars, Kari Ellen Gade and Klaus Johan Myrvoll, who are specialists in Old Norse metre, have recently re-examined Gísli's oeuvre. One of them, Myrvoll, has now moved considerably further in the direction

49 See her description and analysis of these in the Introduction to her edition of the poetry from *Gísla saga* in *SkP* V.

50 See Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's verse', pp. 221–3 for an overview of previous scholarship. A kenning such as *Gísl* 15/3 *sólar saldeilandi* [ruler of the hall of the sun (*lit*. 'sun's hall-ruler') SKY/HEAVEN > God] is most unlikely to have been composed before the mid-twelfth century.

51 See most recently, Gade's Introduction to the poetry of *Gísla saga* in *SkP* V; also Foote, 'An Essay on the Saga of Gísli', pp. 114–15 and Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse', pp. 254–5.

of asserting the authenticity of at least a majority, possibly up to four fifths,[52] of the thirty-seven stanzas attributed to Gísli himself, although he concedes that certain stanzas, such as *Gísl* 15–19, which cluster together in particular episodes of the saga associated with Gísli's encounters with one or other of the dream-women, are likely to be the work of either the saga author or someone working to update the saga's presentation of its protagonist's views of death and the afterlife in order to make them more compatible with Christian ideology.

The most recent editor of the poetry in *Gísla saga*, Kari Ellen Gade, has adopted a more cautious assessment:[53]

> … the discrepancies between prose and poetry (both with regard to 'factual' stanzas and dream stanzas) in some of the sections of the prose make it unlikely that the bulk of the poetry was composed by the same person (or persons) who was responsible for the prose of *Gísl*. Furthermore, most of the stanzas do not display metrical or linguistic features that are associated with a thirteenth-century date of composition; rather, many of them contain stable diagnostic features that would indicate that they could not have been composed later than the end of the twelfth century, such as *a* : *ǫ* rhymes in even lines (*Gísl* 18/4, 25/2, 30/6, 33/2) and hiatus words (6/6 *bráa*, 11/4 *þáa-*, 25/2 *grǫum*, 26/8 *sæing*, 27/6 *féi*, 36/2 *gnáar*).

The crucial question in one's assessment of the poetry in *Gísla saga* is then whether it is possible to narrow down the date or dates of composition of the saga's poetry in any way. If it antedates 1200, can we be any more precise about when it is likely to have been composed and can we distinguish between various groups of stanzas to the extent of proposing multiple authorship for them? Gade supposes that the poetry originated in different ways and from different sources, and that the dream stanzas may have been composed in a milieu like that which arguably produced *Vǫluspá* [The Seeress's Prophecy] at the intersection between the old and new religions in Iceland. This may suggest a date somewhere in the eleventh century or possibly in the early twelfth. My own view is that the dream stanzas belong to a somewhat later period of the second half of the twelfth century, as argued by several earlier scholars, when poetry on Christian subjects was using kennings and other forms of diction comparable to those in some of the dream stanzas. Ultimately, however, such assessments combine an element of subjectivity with the evidence of metre, language, diction and subject matter.

Beyond the date of 1275–85, to which *Njáls saga* is usually assigned, there appears to have been a fresh interest in the creation or sometimes the

52 Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse', pp. 248–57.

53 The following quotation is from the Introduction to Gade's edition of the poetry from *Gísla saga* in *SkP* V. I am indebted to her for letting me quote it here.

reworking of sagas of Icelanders to include a good deal of poetry. While there has been renewed scholarly interest in the poetry of *Njáls saga*, consequent upon recent research into its various manuscript versions,[54] the remainder of the poetry from sagas of this period, except perhaps for *Grettis saga*, has been somewhat neglected. A more detailed treatment of the corpus of late sagas of Icelanders is the subject of Chapter 7 of this book, so the present discussion will confine itself to the question of the authenticity of their poetry.

Several of the sagas in this group show a connection with narratives recorded in *Landnámabók*. There is evidence in some cases (*Harðar saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, *Svarfdœla saga*) that earlier, thirteenth-century predecessors of the extant late thirteenth- or fourteenth-century sagas may have existed and that some poetry in the present sagas might have been contemporary with the sagas' earlier versions rather than with the later texts that have come down to us. Nevertheless, very little of this poetry is likely to be older than the first half of the thirteenth century. In a very few instances, stanzas from the tenth or early eleventh century seem to have been preserved. An example is probably *Svarfd* 5 by Þorleifr jarlsskáld [Jarl's poet] Rauðfeldarson, active c. 970–c. 995, which is also in *Landnámabók*[55] along with a brief account of the episode that generated it. There is also a group of late sagas whose poetry was probably composed by the author of the prose himself. These include *Harðar saga*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu* and *Víglundar saga*.

It is now accepted that *Njáls saga* was reworked not long after its likely original date of composition and that in some manuscripts thirty new stanzas were added to the twenty-three, including six also found in *Kristni saga* [The Saga of Christianisation], probably original to the work. All the additional stanzas, which were possibly the compositions of a single individual, are found in the first part of the saga (before chapter 100 on the introduction of Christianity to Iceland) and all occur at dramatic high points in the narrative in order to expand on the saga's presentation of its main characters, often replacing the corresponding prose passages in the original text. R. D. Fulk, the editor of the *Njáls saga* stanzas for *SkP* V, has suggested that the motivation to add the stanzas, which bear linguistic signs of late thirteenth-century composition, may have been a perception that the relatively unadorned character of the original text was an aesthetic and literary defect. This observation is significant in view of the similar character of the poetry in other late sagas of Icelanders, cited at dramatic high points in the characters' inner lives.

Near the end of *Njáls saga* the scene of action moves to the northern British Isles and the saga quotes in full a sensational eleven-stanza *fornyrðislag*

54 See Emily Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (eds), *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga: The historia mutila of Njála*. The Northern Medieval World: On the Margins of Europe (Kalamazoo, MI, 2018).

55 *ÍF* 1, p. 254, edited in *SkP* IV as Þjsk Lv 1b^{IV}.

poem, *Darraðarljóð* 'The Song of Dǫrruðr' (*Nj* 53–63), that it associates with the forthcoming Battle of Clontarf, fought in Ireland in 1014. In his Introduction to the poem in *SkP* V, Fulk has suggested that this poem could be an authentic early eleventh-century composition. He associates it stylistically with other Old Norse poetry from the northern British Isles and finds no internal evidence in it of late composition. *Darraðarljóð* is not found in any other source besides *Njáls saga* and its origins remain a mystery.

Another great family saga that probably dates from well after 1280 is *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. *Grettis saga* is not only one of the longest sagas of Icelanders, but also the third after *Egils saga* and *Kormáks saga* in terms of the number of stanzas it contains. Most scholars date this saga to the early fourteenth century, and some have even proposed a fifteenth-century date. Most of the poetry, in the form we have it, is likely to be contemporary with the prose text, or very close to it in date, and many stanzas show multiple late linguistic and metrical features that are indicative of late composition.[56] Whoever composed the poetry, and it is likely that more than one person was involved, had a great fondness for elaborate mythological references and obscure allusions, particularly employing the skaldic device of *ofljóst* [excessively clear], in which puns involving homonyms and synonyms refer to concepts, places and persons mentioned in the saga.[57] This poet (whether one or several) seems to have been a keen student of the thirteenth-century poetic handbooks of Snorri Sturluson and Óláfr Þórðarson, but he was also influenced by the contemporary fashion evident from *fornaldarsögur* for autobiographical poetry (*ævikviður*) and for poetry on themes associated with the supernatural.

A small core of stanzas transmitted in *Grettis saga* is likely to be of earlier date, though how much earlier is difficult to say. Snorri Sturluson, writing c. 1225, certainly accepted the notion that the historical Grettir was a poet, as he attributes a *helmingr* to him (*sem Grettir kvað* [as Grettir said]) in *Skáldskaparmál*[58] while two stanzas cited in the Sturlubók and Hauksbók texts of *Landnámabók* as well as in the saga indicate that poetry about some episodes in Grettir's life is likely to have been available to Sturla Þórðarson

56 See the Introduction to Guðni Jónsson's edition of the saga in *ÍF* 7, pp. xxxiii–xlii for examples of late dating features that put the date of composition of most of the poetry somewhere between the late thirteenth and the end of the first half of the fourteenth century. This dating of the poetry is also supported in the Introduction to Jonathan Grove's edition of stanzas from *Grettis saga* in *SkP* V.

57 Examples of *ofljóst* include *Gr* 38/1 and 3–4 and *Gr* 39/3–4. See also *ÍF* 7, p. xxxvii.

58 *SnE* 1998, I, pp. 68–9; this is the first *helmingr* of *Gr* 63 in chapter 72 of the saga, in which Grettir appears in disguise at the Hegranes assembly.

by about 1280.[59] Another of those episodes is commemorated in the first chapter of *Fóstbrœðra saga* as well as in a much more elaborate version in chapter 52 of *Grettis saga*. This is the occasion on which Grettir was captured by the farmers of Ísafjörður, who threatened to hang him as punishment for his theft of food and livestock, but was saved from the gallows by Þorbjǫrg Óláfsdóttir, wife of the local chieftain. *Grettis saga* illustrates this incident with four elaborate stanzas in *kviðuháttr* while the same incident reported in *Fóstbrœðra saga* includes only the plainest of the four (*Gr* 41), suggesting elaboration on the part of the composer of the additional stanzas in *Grettis saga*.[60]

The picture that now emerges from a review of the current state of scholarship on the dating of poetry in sagas of Icelanders is much more nuanced than that promoted by Finnur Jónsson in his arrangement of this poetry in *Skjaldedigtning* A and B, where he used the criterion of chronological authenticity as the basis for the division of the stanzas of a particular saga into *ægte* [genuine] and *uægte* [spurious] categories, the latter being placed within a thirteenth-century or later time-frame, the former being allocated to the tenth or eleventh centuries. Scholars now accept that even those sagas that contain a majority of stanzas that are likely on metrical and linguistic grounds to have been inherited from the period before 1015 will still probably be the result of reworkings and additions to both prose and poetry that took place in stages over the two hundred and more years before the saga achieved the form (or forms) in which it appears in medieval and later manuscripts.

59 These are *Gr* 57 and 58 (*Ldn* 26–7), cited imperfectly in chapter 63 of the saga to illustrate an occasion on which Grettir tricked an opponent, Þórir Skeggjason, into getting stuck in a bog.

60 The Ísafjǫrður episode was probably inserted into the M text of *Fbr* from a version of the episode in *Gr* (cf. *ÍF* 6, pp. 121–2 and notes). It was also the inspiration for the scurrilous poem *Grettisfærsla* [The Moving of Grettir], mentioned in chapter 52 of the saga (*ÍF* 7, p. 168) and cited only after the saga proper in a single manuscript (AM 556 a 4to); see Kate Heslop, '*Grettisfærsla*: The Handing on of Grettir', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 30 (2006), 65–94 and her edition of the same poem forthcoming in *SkP* V. The Ísafjörður episode is discussed again in Chapter 4 below in the context of the way in which the saga writer has staged these stanzas.

4

Strategies of Poetic Communication

Relations between Verse and Prose

In the Introduction I drew attention to the way that skaldic poetry is almost always cited piecemeal as part of a *prosimetrum*, even though some of it at least probably already existed in the form of longer poems before being placed into a prose context. I speculated there that the main reason why saga writers broke up their poetic sources into chunks was to take advantage of the capacity of written prose to articulate an extended narrative, in which events and their protagonists could be treated sequentially. The ability of saga writers to adopt such a mode of citation was greatly enhanced by the eight-line stanzaic form of much skaldic poetry, especially in the court metre *dróttkvætt*, and the capacity of the stanza to be further divisible into a four-line *helmingr* or half-stanza and even a two-line couplet (*fjórðungr*). More often than not stanzas and half-stanzas were syntactically discrete, a quality that made it much easier for them to be woven into the fabric of the *prosimetrum* as self-contained units.

When these self-contained units were used by writers of kings' sagas and other historical works to corroborate the achievements of their royal or aristocratic subjects, it was normal for the poetic citations to occur usually in close proximity to the events described in the prose text. The same is true of the way in which poetic examples (*dæmi*) are cited in the Icelandic treatises on poetics: the writer describes a kenning type or rhetorical figure, and quotes one or more skaldic examples straight afterwards to provide evidence of his description. So, for example, Snorri Sturluson follows his statement about how to compose kennings for battle in *Skáldskaparmál* [The Diction of Poetry] ('Hvernig skal kenna orrostu?'[1]) with seven poetic examples, mostly half-stanzas, although two are couplets. A good many of these are by named poets, introduced by short phrases such as 'Sem kvað Einarr skálaglamm' [As Einarr Tinkle-scales said] or 'Svá sem hér' [As here] and 'Ok enn þetta' [And

1 *SnE* 1998, I, pp. 66–7.

then this], the last two examples being anonymous and the first of them not being syntactically complete.[2]

In comparison with kings' sagas, the less structurally preordained narratives of sagas of Icelanders offered their authors greater scope for how they could situate the poetry they knew about their subjects within their texts, while still insisting on its basic 'occasionality', as Kate Heslop has called this characteristic of skaldic poetry.[3] The present chapter investigates the various strategies that authors of sagas of Icelanders adopted for placing poetry within their narratives as the voice or voices of people of the past, and analyses some of the techniques they used to do so.

In Chapters 1 and 2 I have provided evidence which shows that, while writers of sagas of Icelanders mentioned a number of encomiastic poems composed by tenth- and early eleventh-century Icelandic poets about their fellow Icelanders, they mostly refrained from quoting them in their narratives. Much of this poetry could have been cited in authenticating mode, as a small amount of it actually is, principally in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga* but also in *Fóstbræðra saga* and occasionally elsewhere.[4] I have argued so far that the main reason why this poetry was not cited, or not cited at length, is likely to have been an aesthetic choice rather than a concern for its authenticity: namely, that it did not fit the predominantly situational mode of saga writing that characterises this genre. In addition, the quotation of several stanzas, one after another, in a saga text, would have slowed the narrative and reduced its dramatic impact,[5] and so was most probably

2 See Anthony Faulkes' comment to the second to last of these examples in *SnE* 1998, I, p. 194.

3 Kate Heslop, *Viking Mediologies: A New History of Skaldic Poetics*, Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (New York, 2022), Conclusion, p. 189.

4 For example, *Gunnl* 21, said to be from a *Gunnlaugsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Gunnlaugr] by Þórðr Kolbeinsson, is cited in authenticating mode to confirm (*sanna*) details of certain men that Gunnlaugr killed, although some modern editors have doubted its authenticity (see Introduction to the stanza in *SkP* V). The single stanza by Þorkell elfararskáld (Þelf Lv 1 (*Nj* 27)), cited in *Njáls saga* to support the saga's account of Gunnarr Hámundarson's last stand, with its reference to the location of the fight and the numbers of dead and wounded, is another authenticating stanza, which may be a verse from a longer encomium.

5 Hallvard Magerøy, in an interesting and perceptive article, 'Skaldestrofer som retardasjonsmiddel i Islendingesogene', in Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds), *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*. Parts I–II (Reykjavík, 1977), II, pp. 586–99, argued that the insertion of skaldic stanzas in a saga text often acts as a means of slowing the narrative before a climactic point or of introducing a narrative digression that enhances the dramatic tension of the main story line. A similar point has been made by Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 6–9.

avoided for that reason too. In the whole corpus of extant sagas of Icelanders, there are very few poems or groups of stanzas quoted within a saga text without a break of any kind. Two that come to mind, though they are very different, are the three-stanza libel (*flím*) named *Grámagaflím* [Grey-belly Libel] (*BjH* 26–8) said to have been composed by Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi about his rival Þórðr, and the eleven-stanza *Darraðarljóð* [Song of Dǫrruðr] (Anon *Darr* (*Nj* 53–63)), preserved in manuscripts of *Njáls saga*.[6] Mostly, even where stanzas probably did once belong to a single poem, they are broken up and staged as if they were the spontaneous utterances of individuals at a particular point in a narrative.[7]

Before we investigate the various strategies of communication that authors of sagas of Icelanders used within the *prosimetrum*, there is a general question that requires consideration. Were saga writers concerned to match their poetic sources to their prose narratives so that the poetry would complement the prose, or were they more concerned for dramatic verisimilitude? A further consideration here is the extent to which thirteenth-century saga authors and their audiences could actually understand the poetry they were citing. In some cases it is clear that they or their audiences were unlikely to have done so, and it is observable that the complexity of the poetry must sometimes have led them to devise very detailed prose explanations to accompany the verse in order to naturalise it in the saga text.[8]

6 It may be significant that both these poems are in the eddic metre *fornyrðislag* (*Grám* in the variant *runhent fornyrðislag* with the lines rhyming in pairs) and therefore perhaps regarded as sufficiently extradiegetic to be quotable *in toto*, rather as *Grottasǫngr* [The Song of Grotti] is cited within the text of some manuscripts of *Skáldskaparmál.*

7 The example of the *Máhlíðingarvísur* in *Eyrbyggja saga*, already discussed in earlier chapters and further discussed below, is a good example of this practice, as is the *Þorgeirsdrápa* [*Drápa* about Þorgeirr] of Þormóðr Bersason (Þorm *Þorgdr*), fifteen stanzas of which (*Fbr* 2–7, 10–18) are interspersed in the prose of *Fóstbræðra saga* (*Fbr*). In the latter case, however, the stanzas refer mainly to events of a dead skald's past, as recalled by his foster-brother, rather in the manner of an *erfidrápa* [memorial poem], a term that is actually used to describe the poem in two places in the prose text (*ÍF* 6, pp. 130, 139).

8 An example where the prose text attempts a detailed explanation of a puzzling passage of poetry, in this case in the form of a kenning, is *Korm* 8o/2, 4 *gnógir bokkar díkis* [plentiful billy-goats [*or* fellows} of the ditch]. The context is that, in order to rescue Steingerðr from some vikings, Kormákr and his brother have to swim between the vikings' ship and the shore. The literal meaning of the noun *bokkar* here is uncertain (cf. *Meissner* 116), but may be from *bokkr* [he-goat] or *bokki* [fellow, person] (as in *stórbokki* [an overbearing person]), but the prose text provides a vivid description of Kormákr being attacked by a group of eels (*álar*) slithering over his hands and feet. Here the prose offers a

There are in fact large numbers of inconsistencies and mismatches between the poetry and prose of *prosimetra* within sagas of Icelanders, although this is a subject whose implications have not been much commented on by saga critics. These mismatches seem to indicate that rational consistency was not a very important goal of saga authors, or, alternatively, that it was a goal that frequently could not be achieved. While some of this lack of fit may be attributed to the writers' inability to understand the poetic texts of the stanzas,[9] most of the inconsistences are too blatant for this to be the likely reason. There are stanzas clearly addressed in-text to a woman, when the addressee according to the prose is a man, or vice versa; sometimes stanzas are addressed to a specific person though the prose text gives no indication of there being an interlocutor present;[10] there are references in-text to objects, persons, places or events that have no presence in the prose text at all or are different there;[11] there are also discrepancies in numbers, often about the numbers of men killed in a particular fight.[12] In other cases the poetry is probably misplaced within the prose text or the stanzas are likely to be

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strikingly detailed interpretation of a poetic text which probably uses *bokkar* in a metaphorical sense for a referent that would otherwise be uncertain (cf. Þul *Hafrs* 1/6III and Note).

9 A clear example is *Fbr* 18 (Þorm *Þorgdr* 15), where the stanza indicates that Þorgeirr killed thirteen men over the course of his life, but the prose text understands this to mean that he killed thirteen men in his final battle. Another, more complex example, also from *Fbr*, is *Fbr* 5 (Þorm *Þorgdr* 4), where the prose text attributes the final falling out between Þormóðr and Þorgeirr to the latter's speculation about who would win a contest of strength between the two of them, while the stanza seems to attribute their falling out to other people's slander and malevolence.

10 So, for example, *Glúm* 7, which is addressed to a woman, though the prose text does not mention an addressee. In *Grettis saga Gr* 30/7–8 is addressed to a single male listener, but none is mentioned in the prose text (similarly *Gr* 31/4). In *Hallfreðar saga* Hfr Lv 13 (*Hallfr* 16) is addressed to a man (a warrior-kenning), but the prose text has it addressed to a woman (Ingibjǫrg) about the death of her husband Auðgísl. Hfr Lv 17/3 (*Hallfr* 20) mentions a dog (?) named Strútr, which is not referred to anywhere in the prose text; Hfr Lv 22 (*Hallfr* 26) is addressed to a woman (*snót*), and probably intended to refer to Kolfinna, but no woman is mentioned in the prose text at this point.

11 In *Svarfdœla saga Svarfd* 10–14 accord badly with the surrounding prose, which does not agree with the contents of these stanzas. In *Gunnlaugs saga Gunnl* 13/7–8 and 16/1–2 state that Helga was married to Hrafn for money, but there is nothing in the prose text to suggest that; *Gunnl* 15/7–8 (spoken by Hrafn) refers to him launching his ship, but there is no reference to this in the prose text.

12 In *Heiðarvíga saga* the tallies of the dead at the battle on the heath given in the prose text differ from the numbers given in the poetry of Eiríkr viðsjá and Tindr Hallkelsson. Various scholars have put different interpretations upon

cited in the wrong order.[13] In at least one instance, the disparity between prose and poetry indicates that the stanza concerned probably derived from a version of the saga narrative different from the main text's.[14] All these types of inconsistency strongly suggest that verisimilitude was the saga authors' main goal, to be achieved by the artful placing of stanzas, often in groups, within an episode of the saga narrative rather than the achievement of rational consistency between poetry and prose. This is also to be expected because in many cases sagas are likely to have been put together from different strands of both poetry and prose, all of varying age and provenance.

Patterns of Stanza Distribution within Saga Texts: Clustering and Dispersal

Table 1 in Chapter 1 lists, in descending numerical order, the sagas conventionally included in the sub-genre of sagas of Icelanders, together with the numbers of stanzas in each of them, while **Table 2** in the same chapter provides a list of the same group of sagas arranged in descending numerical order based on the actual word count of the saga text (prose and poetry) juxtaposed with the number of stanzas in each saga. This list enables one to recognise the proportion of poetry to prose in each text. A comparison of the two lists reveals, first, the great disparity between sagas in the number of stanzas each contains, and then the differences in intensity of poetic focus in each text when the absolute length of each saga is assessed in terms of word count compared to stanza count. We see, among the most striking statistics, that, while *Egils saga* contains the largest number of stanzas (if we include

these discrepancies; see Colin Grant's Introduction to the poetry of both skalds in *SkP* V.

13 Editors of *Droplaugarsona saga* consider it probable that stanzas 2–5 are likely to refer to a different fight from the one with which the prose text associates them (see Introduction to Richard Perkins' edition of *Dpl* stanzas in *SkP* V); in *Svarfdœla saga Svarfd* 10 and 11 seem to be responses to *Svarfd* 12, suggesting the stanzas are cited in the wrong order.

14 This is the stanza (*Laxd* 3) attributed in *Laxdœla saga* to Þorgils Hǫlluson, and probably from a now lost saga about him. In line 4 of the stanza the speaker, Þorgils, gives details of the revenge attack on Helgi Harðbeinsson by several men, including himself, 'þás fylgðum Þorleiki' [when we followed Þorleikr], a wording implying the Þorleikr Bollason, the elder son of the murdered Bolli Þorleiksson, was the leader of the expedition and Helgi's killer. However, the prose text of *Laxd* has the younger son, Bolli Bollason, in this role (cf. *ÍF* 5, pp. 192–3 and Lars Lönnroth, 'The Saga of Thorgils Holluson', in Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini (eds), *News from Other Worlds. Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture in Honor of John F. Lindow* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 101–8).

the long poems), it is only the third-longest saga in absolute terms, where *Njáls saga* reigns supreme. The greatest discrepancy between rank determined in terms of absolute number of stanzas and rank determined by word count and stanzas is surely *Kormáks saga*, a short work (10,305 words) in terms of its prosimetrical content, but one crowded with eighty-five stanzas. Indeed, the saga author (or authors) had more poetry available than they were well able to handle, and in at least two cases, and incipiently in a third, repeated the same stanza in two different places in the prose text without apparently realising it.[15]

Given the disparities discussed above and in Chapter 1, it is to be expected that the arrangement of poetry within saga prose, the *prosimetrum*, will also be disparate, and so it proves. In fact, in sagas with only one or two stanzas, it is arguable whether the application of the term *prosimetrum* is even accurate. For this reason I propose to exclude from further discussion of the disposition of poetry and prose the following sagas which contain only one or two stanzas: *Grœnlendinga saga*, *Kumblbúa þáttr*, *Reykdœla saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga*. Of these, all but *Kumblbúa þáttr* contain stanzas that are also present in other texts.

Many sagas of Icelanders that follow a biographical model, in which the chief character's life-history structures the main narrative, have a tendency to cite single stanzas or small groups of stanzas at significant intervals in the protagonist's biography. For the most part they adopt the technique of clustering stanzas round particular episodes of their narrative or dispersing them at intervals to mark individual high points in the protagonist's life-history. The poets' sagas and the sagas of outlaws follow this model and it is they that are the most prolific of the corpus in total numbers of stanzas. Aside from *Njáls saga*, all sagas in the first group of texts in **Table 1** that contain the largest amount of poetry are either sagas whose protagonists are poets (Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, Þormóðr Bersason, Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi, Hallfreðr Óttarsson, Gunnlaugr Illugason), or are outlaws (Grettir Ásmundarson, Gísli Súrsson), while the

15 The repeated stanzas are *Korm* 37 and 45 and *Korm* 52 and 65. Most modern editions do not reproduce both stanzas from each pair and select only the one that they consider the better; in *SkP* V both versions are given. The saga writer, in a rare intervention, presents the first line of *Korm* 76, 'Baugi varðk at bœta' [I had to pay with a ring], again later in the same chapter (ch. 24, *ÍF* 8, p. 293; M fol. 128va, line 6), acknowledging that he had already used the stanza: 'Kormákr kvað sǫmu vísu, sem fyrr er ritin: "Baugi varð at bœta"' [Kormákr spoke the same stanza, as has been written earlier, 'It had to be paid with a ring']; (note the slight difference in wording). This comment may suggest that whoever wrote this passage was working from a written source that had repeated the stanza.

saga of a third outlaw, Hǫrðr Grímkelsson, comes in second place within Group 2, with nineteen stanzas.

While it is unsurprising to find the poets' sagas so high on the list of sagas containing many stanzas, it is less obvious why the three sagas of outlaws should figure there. Of the three outlaw protagonists, only Grettir has anything of a reputation as a poet according to other medieval sources.[16] Even in the saga named for him, however, most of the stanzas are unlikely to have been the early eleventh-century Grettir Ásmundarson's own compositions, and similar doubts have been raised about Gísli's poetry, especially in the sequences of dream stanzas, as discussed in Chapter 3. Hǫrðr too, together with the various other speakers of stanzas in *Harðar saga*, is not plausibly the composer of the late, probably fourteenth-century poetry in that saga. The main reason why the outlaw sagas have attracted their composers to supply them with a great deal of verse is that they share a biographical model with the poets' sagas.[17] They appear as the central characters in their sagas, around whose high points, by extension from the *skáldasaga* model, stanzas cluster in groups. In addition, by virtue of the fact that outlaws spent long periods of their lives on the run, with little social contact except with a small number of helpers or, by contrast, when fending off individual enemies, the dramatic moments of their lives needed to be objectified somehow, and poetry provided the most suitable literary medium for that at the saga writer's disposal.

Egils saga, with its great wealth of stanzas, will serve as an example of the techniques of clustering and dispersal. The Norwegian prelude (chapters 1–23)[18] to the saga's action contains no poetry, and chapters 24–40 have dispersed stanzas attributed to Egill's father and grandfather and to himself as a precocious small boy. The first cluster does not come until chapter 44 and comprises three stanzas (*Eg* 8–10) that dramatise Egill's violent and drunken encounter with Bárðr, the steward of King Eiríkr blóðøx [Blood-axe], on the Norwegian island of Atløy. The theme of this cluster, Egill's antipathy to Norwegian authority and his ruthless aggression towards its representatives, looks forward to later clusters in the saga, including the events leading up to his composition and recital of *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head-ransom] (*Eg* 34–54), and his retrospective account of how he survived his encounter with King Eiríkr blóðøx at York. This encounter is also presented in the *prosimetrum*

16 As noted in **Table 6** in Chapter 1, the first half of *Gr* 63^{V} appears in *Skáldskaparmál* (*SnE* 1998, I, 68) to illustrate kennings for weapons and armour; two stanzas (*Gr* 57–8^{V}) appear in *Landnámabók* (*ÍF* 1, pp. 280–3) in somewhat different form.

17 As I have argued previously, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Old Norse-Icelandic Saga* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 131, 134–5.

18 Chapters of *Egils saga* are numbered in accordance with the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* 2).

in dispersed mode in *Eg* 56, 57 and 58, and is further reflected upon in *Arinbjarnarkviða* [Poem about Arinbjǫrn] stanzas 3–9 (*Eg* 99–105), where, strictly speaking, it is extratextual, as this poem is not found in any early manuscript version of the saga. Other clusters of note in *Egils saga* are the two English episodes, the first in chapters 50–5 (*Eg* 16–22), with the two stanzas mourning the loss of his brother Þórólfr coming at the end of it, and the second in chapters 59–61, incorporating Egill's adventure in York. Other clusters in this saga are indeed episodes of adventure that form self-contained narratives of a picaresque kind which in many respects could be cut loose from the saga's main narrative and may have been later accretions to it. Some of the poetry in these clusters has long been suspected of inauthenticity, as mentioned in Chapter 3, including the stanzas in the story of Egill's duel with Ljótr inn bleiki [the Pale] (*Eg* 59–63) and those found in chapters 71–2 about Egill's adventure in Swedish Värmland and his encounter with Ármóðr, reminiscent in its grotesqueness of the much earlier combat with Bárðr. The group of stanzas in which Egill's fellow-skald Einarr skálaglamm [Tinkle-scales] Helgason plays a part (*Eg* 122–6) constitutes another cluster, whose content was probably partly borrowed from *Jómsvíkinga saga* [The Saga of the Jómsvíkingar].[19] Finally, Egill's three stanzas (*Eg* 130–2) about the trials of old age occur together in the final chapter 85 of his saga.

Not all of the poetry in *Egils saga* appears in clusters. Some of it occurs in dispersed mode within or just after a long stretch of prose, and this solitary placing accentuates the stanza's rhetorical effect at a point of high drama in the narrative. A good example of the dispersed mode is *Eg* 64 in chapter 65, Egill's account to his companions of the duel in which he finally disposes of Atli inn skammi [the Short], the last of the antagonists who stood in the way of his acquisition of his wife's inheritance in Norway, a strand in the saga narrative begun many chapters and stanzas earlier. The stanza, with Egill's explosive but cryptic announcement of how he killed Atli by biting through his windpipe,[20] comes at the end of a carefully prepared prose account of the events leading up to the man's death. Other stanzas that stand alone in *Egils saga*, often right at the ends of chapters, are *Eg* 32 in chapter 57, a vivid description of a storm at sea, and *Eg* 65 in chapter 67, praise of a costly silk cloak, the gift of the poet's friend Arinbjǫrn. This latter stanza occurs only in the A-recension of the saga text in Möðruvallabók and seems to be part of a strand of the saga, unique to that recension, which is devoted to honouring

19 See the Introduction to *Eg* 124–5 in *SkP* V and Margaret Clunies Ross, 'A Tale of Two Poets: Egill Skallagrímsson and Einarr Skálaglamm', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 120 (2005), 69–82.

20 On the hidden meaning by *ofljóst* [excessively clear, too clear], a type of word play, of l. 8 of this stanza, *ek bar sauð*, literally 'I carried the sheep', see Jón Helgason, 'Ek bar sauð', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica*, 23 (1955), 94–6.

Arinbjǫrn and Egill's friendship with him. The vocabulary describing the cloak in lines 1–3 of the stanza is echoed closely in the prose text that precedes its citation.

Most of the longer sagas of Icelanders arrange their stanzas in combinations of dispersed single stanzas and clusters attached to discrete prose episodes of the narrative. There are some exceptions, however, for which various explanations are possible. In some cases the saga's likely prehistory provides a clue to the way poetry is disposed within the text. The seventeen stanzas in *Svarfdœla saga* occur only in the middle section (chapters 11–22) that deals with the characters' settlement in Iceland. The first ten chapters and the last six contain no poetry. Within the middle section there is a heavy concentration of stanzas in three chapters, 16 (*Svarfd* 1–4), 19 (*Svarfd* 7–15) and 22 (*Svarfd* 16–17). The saga itself is probably datable to the fourteenth century, but, in the opinion of its two most recent editors, Kari Ellen Gade and Jónas Kristjánsson, the poetry may be part of an older, thirteenth-century version of the saga, about which *Landnámabók* provides some suggestive evidence.[21] Whereas a number of the stanzas are a poor fit with their prose surrounds, suggesting that whoever created the present saga may not have fully understood them, there are features in a number of them, recited in connection with upcoming battles, that are reminiscent of stanzas in *Sturlunga saga* that predict the battle of Örlygsstaðir, which took place in 1238. Jónas Kristjánsson[22] suggested that the *Sturlunga saga* stanzas may have been modelled on poetry in circulation in Iceland at the time of the battle, in which case the *Svarfd* stanzas may have been part of an older version of the saga, datable to c. 1240–80.

Different reasons may be postulated for the unequal distribution of stanzas in other sagas. The fourteenth-century *Bárðar saga* adopts a biographical mode of presenting the life of the mysterious Bárðr Snæfellsáss 'Deity of Snæfell' and his son Gestr in a manner that is strongly reminiscent of a saint's life,[23] but, in spite of that, the poetry in this saga occurs in only a few places (chapters 5, 7–9) and follows local traditions about supernatural happenings to minor characters in the narrative rather than ornamenting the life histories of its two male protagonists with verse. It is the strength of local tradition that is important in this narrative and this is also apparent in the verse forms in which the *Bárðar saga* stanzas are composed: a mix of *fornyrðislag*, irregular *dróttkvætt* and irregular *málaháttr*.

Still other reasons may underlie the highly restricted use of poetry in a text such as *Laxdœla saga*. The small quantity and scrappiness of the poetry cited

21 See Gade's discussion in the Introduction to her edition of *Svarfd* in *SkP* V.

22 *ÍF* 9, p. xci.

23 As demonstrated by Siân Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero. Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature*. Studies in Old Norse Literature 2 (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 196–207.

in this saga, compared to the saga writer's relatively frequent and scholarly mention of his prose authorities, must represent a conscious choice on his part, as has already been proposed in Chapter 3. This possibility is underlined by the fact that most of the poetry in the saga (*Laxd* 3–5) is confined to parts of the text probably taken from another source, the saga of Þorgils Hǫlluson, which the author of *Laxdœla saga* acknowledges by name.[24] This author is not uninterested in poetry, however, as he mentions several long poems in the saga but does not quote from them (for details see **Table 7a** in Chapter 2). He just does not seem to want to use poetry in his own narrative, perhaps because he considered it inauthentic. One can only speculate on his reasons. It is of course possible that no orally transmitted poetry on his main subject, the three-way love affair between Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, Kjartan Óláfsson and Bolli Þorleiksson, existed and, as a careful historian, he might not have wanted to invent any. Alternatively, he may not have considered skaldic poetry a suitable medium for the romance elements that most scholars have detected in his treatment of the love triangle central to his saga. If so, he turned his back decisively on the tradition of skaldic love poetry so evident in the *skáldasögur*.[25]

How Clusters are Formed

It is clear, from what we know of indigenous Old Norse genres of poetry, that many clusters of stanzas in sagas of Icelanders are formed on the basis of pre-existing poetic structures, which may sometimes have had the status of traditional compositional units.[26] Some of these structures have traditional names, like *lofkvæði* [praise-poem], *erfikviða* or *erfidrápa* [memorial poem], *mansǫngr* [love-song], *níðvísa* [insult, calumny], *flím* [lampoon,

24 *ÍF* 5, p. 199.

25 He could also, like the author of *Gísla saga*, have drawn direct inspiration from heroic poetry in eddic metres, such as the poems of the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda involving the hero Sigurðr and his tangled relationships with Guðrún, her brother Gunnarr, and the valkyrie Brynhildr.

26 I hesitate to use the modern term 'genre' to refer to these compositional units, but they are identifiable to modern analysis and must have been recognisable to medieval audiences. On the difficulties associated with the use of the term 'genre' to refer to Old Norse-Icelandic literature, especially poetry, see Brittany Schorn, 'Eddic Modes and Genres', in Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (eds), *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry. Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 231–51. More recently, the concept of genre in Old Icelandic literature has been the subject of Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (eds), *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre* (Cambridge, 2020); see the taxonomy of poetic genres on pp. 317–21.

libel], *mannjafnaðr* [comparison of men] and *senna* [flyting]. Other clusters, such as stanzas describing battles or hand-to-hand fights, have no known conventional labels, and we can only analyse them on the basis of modern terminology. In still other cases, post-medieval Icelandic terms, such as *ævikvíða* [life-poem, autobiography] have been coined for them. To the extent that these categories must have been culturally recognisable to the medieval audiences of Icelandic sagas, ready-made meaning would have accrued to poetry arranged according to such structures. Further, their known semiotic connotations may have made them easier to remember than clusters that did not conform to known structures. The structuring would have been inherent in the cluster, if the poetry within it was authentically early, or may have been introduced by the saga writer or compiler as a means of arranging the stanzas, if the poetry was the composition of a later age.

In many cases, the identifying indigenous structures are easy for a modern scholar to recognise, and were presumably so also for a medieval Icelander; in other instances, they are not so straightforward. Of the thirty-nine stanzas in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* (*BjH*) about half conform to indigenous structural patterns familiar from other bodies of skaldic poetry, whether in sagas of Icelanders or in other sub-genres. Most occur in clusters, though sometimes in pairs or singly. For example, *BjH* 2 adopts a conventional pattern in which the speaker contrasts his hard work at sea or in battle with the easy life of a man on shore, in this case his rival Þórðr, imagined as having vigorous sex with the speaker's beloved, now the rival's wife. In a similar vein is *BjH* 16, in which the speaker, Bjǫrn, imagines his rival in bed, clumsily attempting sexual intercourse, belittling and insulting him in a manner similar to *Hallfr* 15, a stanza on an exactly similar topic. Audiences would recognise these subjects and their structural identifiers that border on *níð* poetry, because they would have heard such poetry before. Other stanzas in *Bjarnar saga* in similar vein are the pair of stanzas, *BjH* 18 and 19, as well as the cluster *BjH* 21–4, in which the rivals, Bjǫrn and Þórðr, exchange insults, and the probably authentic, but only partially preserved *níð* stanza, *BjH* 20.[27] *Grámagaflím* [Grey-belly Libel] (*BjH* 26–8), Bjǫrn's libel on the subject of Þórðr's allegedly strange conception after his mother had eaten a slimy fish, brings the poetic structures of insult in this saga to a climax. Other clusters, such as *BjH* 7–11, more closely resemble the ethnic genre of *mannjafnaðr* [comparison of men], in which rivals compare and contrast their own qualities and deeds (actual or fictional), than they do the *senna* [flyting], although the distinction between the two terms is blurred in practice.[28]

27 On the *níð* stanza here, see the Introduction to *BjH* 20 by Alison Finlay in *SkP* V.

28 Edith Marold, 'The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen

One other interesting structural pattern in *Bjarnar saga*, which does not seem to have a recorded traditional name, is exemplified by the stanzas *BjH* 4 and 5 together with *BjH* 14 and 15. These paired *fornyrðislag* stanzas are examples of what could be called a hospitality formula directed at a guest. If the guest was welcome, he could be invited to stay by his host, using a set formula, and he would then respond to the host by varying the formula to indicate his acceptance. This positive version of the formula is expressed in the first two stanzas (*Ket* 1–2^{VIII}) of the *fornaldarsaga Ketils saga hængs* [The saga of Ketill Salmon], in which a Sámi man, Brúni, offers the travelling Ketill hospitality, which Ketill gladly accepts. By contrast, the *BjH* stanzas exemplify the opposite of this situation, in which a host, Þórðr Kolbeinsson, tells his unwanted guest, Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi, to leave ('út skaltu ganga' [you must get out] *BjH* 4/1, 8; 14/1, 8), to which the guest stubbornly retorts (*BjH* 5/1, 8) 'hér munk sitja' [here I will sit] and later (*BjH* 15/1, 8) 'kyrr munk sitja' [I shall sit quiet].

Some late sagas of Icelanders share at least two other recognisable structural patterns with *fornaldarsögur*. The first of these is the indigenous genre termed *ævikviða* (plural *ævikviður*) in later Icelandic. The genre, as its name implies, embodies a retrospective, autobiographical perspective on a speaker's life couched as a series of stanzas that review his achievements over his lifetime. It is often uttered at the point of the hero's death.[29] There is evidence from sagas such as *Qrvar-Odds saga*, which exists in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century versions, that there was a vogue for this kind of poetry in the late Middle Ages, and a tendency for some *ævikviður* to grow longer and longer until they became almost independent of their prose contexts.[30] The influence of this genre is apparent in *Grettis saga*, where there are two sequences of Grettir's *ævikviður*, *Gr* 22–4 and *Gr* 39–42, both in the metre *kviðuháttr*.[31] Both refer to dramatic high points in Grettir's life when

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Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 75–124, at pp. 99–102 has suggested that *BjH* 7–11 may be based on a pre-existing *flokkr* [long poem without a refrain], but it seems more likely that the references in these stanzas to deeds not mentioned in the extant saga are characteristics of the *mannjafnaðr* genre, in which rivals typically refer to events and places that have no empirical basis in the narrative concerned. *Qrv* 34–58^{VIII} is an extended example of such a practice.

29 For a fuller description of the *ævikviða* genre, see the section on structure, style and diction of *fornaldarsaga* poetry in the Introduction to *SkP* VIII, pp. lxxxi–lxxxii.

30 This certainly happened to Qrvar-Oddr's *ævikviða* in the fifteenth-century manuscripts AM 343 a 4to and AM 471 4to. See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Autographical Turn in Late Medieval Icelandic Poetry', in Klaus Müller-Wille *et al.* (eds), *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften. Scandinavian Textscapes. Vänbok till Jürg Glauser* (Tübingen, 2017), pp. 150–4.

31 The *dróttkvætt* stanzas *Gr* 66–70, which are not in all manuscripts of the saga,

he was in great danger but was saved from death by individuals to whom he expresses his gratitude. In the second set of verses, discussed below, the stanzas are staged as a question-and-answer exchange between Grettir and the husband of a woman who had saved him from being hanged by a group of disgruntled farmers. The influence of the *ævikviða* on *Grettis saga* is also apparent in the poem *Hallmundarkviða* [Poem of Hallmundr] (*Gr* 51–6), uttered by the giant-like being Hallmundr, who, on the point of death, reviews memorable encounters he has had with Grettir and boasts of his killings of diverse supernatural beings, from ogres to elves.

Grettis saga also shows the influence of a second *fornaldarsaga* convention, usually couched as a dialogue between the saga hero and a revenant whose burial mound has been disturbed. Typically the saga protagonist breaks into the burial mound of a long-dead warrior, often a viking, to steal gold, weapons and armour in order to appropriate them for himself. This topic may have developed from folk-tale-like narratives associated with men such as the probably historical Miðfjarðar-Skeggi, who is said, both in *Landnámabók* and in several sagas, to have broken into the burial mound of the legendary hero Hrólfr kraki [Pole-ladder] in Denmark, and stolen his sword Skǫfnungr, a weapon that is also said to have played its part in fights in Settlement-Age Iceland.[32] According to *Kormáks saga*[33] Skeggi reluctantly lends Kormákr Ǫgmundarson this sword for his duel with his beloved Steingerðr's first husband, Hólmgǫngu [Dueling]-Bersi. In sagas of Icelanders the topic functions as a bridge between the world of legend and the semi-historical saga world, with the hero showing cool courage (often by contrast with his cowardly companions) in engaging with the mound-dweller, often physically, wresting the treasure or weapon from his grasp, and returning to tell the tale to his companions. A version of the standard format for this topic can be seen in Hǫrðr Grímkelsson's encounter with the dead viking Sóti in *Harðar saga* (*Harð* 8–12): their exchange is dialogic and mostly in *fornyrðislag*. *Grettis saga* has two incidents of mound-breaking, both accompanied by a pair of stanzas, *Gr* 17–18 and 60–1. Neither conforms fully to the mound-breaking topic, but both are clearly based upon it. In *Gr* 17–18, the topic is overlaid by a question-and-answer prose frame, in which a Norwegian landowner named Þorfinnr asks Grettir how he came by money and treasure (including a short-sword (*sax*)) that he had taken from the burial mound of the speaker's father, Kárr inn gamli [the

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and are probably later additions to it, also resemble the *ævikviða* form, and, aside from *Gr* 70, deal with episodes in Grettir's life that do not form part of the extant saga narrative.

32 See *ÍF* 1, pp. 212–13 for the *Landnámabók* reference and note 5 on those pages for information about Skeggi's role in sagas of Icelanders.

33 *ÍF* 8, pp. 234–6.

Old]. Grettir's reply (*Gr* 18) describes how he wrested the *sax* from Kárr's grasp. The prose surrounds of these two stanzas are not fully compatible with the content of the stanzas, and it is possible that they are cited in the wrong order. The second pair of stanzas (*Gr* 60–1) also varies the topic by presenting them as messages carved on runic staves describing Grettir's fight with a giant in an underwater cave, a scene reminiscent of the fight between the hero Beowulf and Grendel's mother in the Old English epic *Beowulf*.[34]

By no means all clusters of stanzas in sagas of Icelanders are formed on the basis of pre-existing structural units or genres. In many sagas, especially those that string together a number of virtually self-contained episodes, linked only by the life-history of the protagonist or by a single main narrative, the episode and the cluster of stanzas that go with it must have been a unit that was capable of being expanded or shortened at will to reflect the availability of stanzas and the tastes of the audience and the saga writers themselves. In line with this variability, it is observable that there is a fluctuating degree of cohesion between the prose and poetry of individual self-contained saga episodes.

There are numerous examples of variable cohesion in *Kormáks saga*'s many clusters. There has been no lack of literary analysis of the ten stanzas (*Korm* 1–10) that make up the saga's first cluster, but yet there is still no consensus about whether the stanzas belong to a single unit or were formed from several sets of originally independent stanzas. Russell Poole[35] has summarised the scholarly debate and proposed his own analysis of these stanzas: he detects a close similarity between stanzas 1–4, which describe Kormákr's first impression of Steingerðr and yet are retrospective, acknowledging with foreboding that their love will be a cause of great unhappiness. Most modern readers would agree that these stanzas are closely similar, but would they also agree that the remaining stanzas in this cluster probably derive from different sequences, Poole's groups 2 (*Korm* 5 and 10), 3 (*Korm* 6, 7, 8), and 4 (*Korm* 9, Kormákr's direction to Tósti to ride off on his horse, with which Poole connects two other stanzas cited much later in the saga, *Korm* 26 and 64)? Is there enough disparity between these groups of stanzas to indicate that they were originally parts of separate poems or sequences? Is the fact that *Korm* 6, 7 and 8, Poole's group 3, all use the topos of evaluating Steingerðr's worth in terms of her monetary value enough to set them apart as likely to have had a separate origin from *Korm* 1–4?

[34] *Beowulf* lines 1441b–1650; for a summary of the literature on this well-known analogue, see R. D. Fulk *et al.* (eds), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2008), pp. xxxvi–xliii and Jonathan Grove's Introduction to the stanzas in *SkP* V.

[35] Russell Poole, 'Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *lausavísur* in *Kormáks saga*', *alvíssmál*, 7 (1997), 37–60.

These are questions that are very hard, if not impossible, to answer. The criteria applied by Poole and most modern scholars are based on modern standards of literary analysis, on similarities of motif, stylistic similarities and so on that may not have been considered significant of disparity to the same extent to a medieval Icelandic audience. There may have been a greater conceptual looseness when it came to a consideration of whether stanzas of poetry belonged together, especially if they had been transmitted orally over a long period of time. When Poole writes 'simply to lump all ten of these verses together, as a compositional and performance unit, seems precluded by the weight of evidence for narrative and motivic heterogeneity',[36] his reasonable position downplays the fact that the author of the prose text did just that, and, it can be argued, made a good job of it. Granted, the direction to the overseer, Tósti, to ride off and leave Kormákr alone to enjoy himself with Steingerðr (*Korm* 9) stands out as a possible interpolation into the poetic sequence,[37] but the character of Tósti is actually integrated into the prose text very effectively, along with the character of Steingerðr's maid (*ambátt*), who has plenty to say in the prose but nothing in the poetry. The author of the prose text has clearly understood the erotic, voyeuristic qualities of the poetry, especially the first four stanzas, and has played on them skilfully to describe Kormákr's view of Steingerðr from afar and her bold returning stare of sexual attraction. The prose then uses direct speech to focus the sexually charged scene further by giving the characters of Tósti and the maid speaking parts that urge on the two would-be lovers to greater intimacy.

In many ways it is easier to detect 'the workings' of prosimetrical episodes in sagas of Icelanders when both prose and poetry arouse some kind of suspicion about their place in the original saga. The final episode of *Kormáks saga* (chapter 27), which is ornamented with four stanzas, falls into this category. The chapter begins with two introductory paragraphs describing Kormákr's expedition to northern Britain, where he and his brother Þorgils establish the fortified town of Scarborough.[38] They then move north to Scotland, where they perform many great feats. However, on one occasion when all his companions have already gone to their ships, Kormákr is

36 'The First Ten *lausavísur*', p. 56.

37 That observation is supported by metrical analysis, which indicates that the two halves of the stanza are likely to have different origins. The first *helmingr* of *Korm* 9 is metrically regular *dróttkvætt*, but the second is full of metrical irregularity, with lines 5 and 7 having no rhyme, line 6 being an even line of Type C, and line 8 having *skothending* rather than *aðalhending*. For details, see the Introduction to the edition of poetry from *Kormáks saga* in *SkP* V.

38 On the likely fiction of the brothers' founding of Scarborough, see Martin Arnold, 'The Legendary Origins of Scarborough', in D. Crouch and T. Pearson (eds), *Medieval Scarborough: Studies in Trade and Civic Life* (Leeds, 2001), pp. 7–14 and Diana Whaley, 'Scarborough Revisited', *Nomina*, 33 (2010), 87–100.

ambushed by a huge Scottish giant with troll-like strength, called in the text a *blótrisi* [sacrifice-giant], and the two engage in a hard struggle, suggesting a wrestling match. Eventually Kormákr is able to draw his sword and strike the giant his death blow, but, in falling, the troll collapses on top of Kormákr, breaking all his ribs, and he is unable to extricate himself until his men come to his rescue. Although he survives for a while, long enough to speak four stanzas, Kormákr eventually dies of his injuries.

The prose text of the episode tells a tale that is light years away from the main narrative of the Icelandic lover-poet and his duels with several rivals for the affection of his beloved. It is more in the mould of a *fornaldarsaga*, with the four stanzas perhaps functioning superficially like an *ævikviða*. But these stanzas contain some serious discrepancies, not only with regard to the prose text but also amongst themselves. With the exception of *Korm* 84,[39] the other three stanzas (*Korm* 82, 83 and 85) express a common theme that is not in any way foregrounded in the prose text, either in chapter 27 or in any other chapter, nor is it found in any other of the remaining stanzas preserved in *Kormáks saga*.[40] The speaker of stanzas 82, 83 and 85 reveals a concern for the kind of death he will suffer and the afterlife to which he can look forward: will he travel to Valhǫll and drink ale in Óðinn's hall like one of the *einherjar*, or will he, as he fears, die ignominiously in his bed? Some close similarities of expression in these three stanzas suggest that they probably belong together in the sense of having been composed by the same person,[41] but they are very unlikely to have been part of the tenth-century poet's life story. There are several indicators in the stanzas that reveal their likely status as a pastiche of poetry on the theme of a viking warrior's approach to Valhǫll, typified by the anonymous twelfth-century poem *Krákumál* [Speeches of the Crow] (Anon *Krm*^{VIII}). The second *helmingr* of *Korm* 82, where the motif is first introduced, must have been composed in imitation of the final stanza of the legendary hero Ragnarr loðbrók's [Hairy-breeches'] dying words (Anon

39 *Korm* 84 appears to relate to a totally different adventure from either the prose text's account or that of the other stanzas in this episode. It addresses a woman, but no woman is present, according to the prose, and asks why her husband has not been with the speaker 'í morgin' [that morning *or* in the morning] in Ireland. If the woman is supposed to be Steingerðr, neither her first nor her second husband ever fought alongside Kormákr in Ireland, according to the extant saga.

40 A possible exception to this generalization is a stanza (*Korm* 44/5, 6, 8) attributed to Steingerðr's first husband, Hólmgǫngu-Bersi Véleifsson, in which he states that he expects to be admitted into 'a much better world' because he has himself sent so many warriors there. The implication is that he has sent them to Valhǫll and that he will be going there too.

41 Compare *Korm* 83/8 *kǫrdauða* [sickbed-dead] (of those who die in their beds) and 85/8 *strádauða* [straw-dead], with the same meaning. Both these compounds are *hapax legomena*.

Krm 29^{VIII}), as he looks forward to drinking ale in Valhǫll. The lines are very close:[42] compare

> myndak ǫl at Óðins
> í ǫndvegi drekka[43]

with

> Glaðr skal ek öl með ásum
> í öndvegi drekka.[44]

It is hard not to see both the lines themselves and the theme of the desired warrior's death as the insertion of a topic alien to *Kormáks saga* into the final chapter of the poet's life-history, for which there might not have otherwise been much evidence and no poetry.[45]

An Important Structuring Device: Question-and-Answer Dialogue

Sagas of Icelanders vary a great deal in the closeness with which their poetry is integrated into the prose text. At their best saga writers make the transition between the two seem effortless, the poetry appearing to flow spontaneously from the mouth (and heart) of the saga character. This is probably the goal to which saga writers aspired but did not always achieve, and it is certainly one that modern literary critics endorse and admire. However, as we have seen elsewhere in the present chapter, medieval Icelandic audiences must have tolerated quite a lot of inconsistency between the two major elements of saga texts, verse and prose, and it seems that they may also have accepted some rather rough methods of integrating the poetry into the saga *prosimetrum*.

42 See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Introduction to *ÍF* 8, p. lxxxvi and the Notes to these stanzas in Edith Marold's edition of the poetry from *Kormáks saga* in *SkP* V. The first *helmingr* of *Korm* 82 is also similar to Anon *Krm* 18/5–6^{VIII} and 20/5–10^{VIII}.

43 *Korm* 82/5–6, 'I would be drinking ale in the high seat at Óðinn's'.

44 Anon *Krm* 29/5–6^{VIII}, 'I shall gladly drink ale with the gods in the high seat'.

45 There is other evidence in *Korm* 82–5 of their being the likely compositions of a poet other than Kormákr Ǫgmundarson. These stanzas have probable echoes of other poems, at least one of which is much later than the tenth century; cf. *Korm* 83/8 *helnauð* [deadly sorrow] and *Eg* 17/7, where the same word is used of Egill's sorrow at his brother's death; *Korm* 84/4 *handfǫgr kona* [woman with beautiful arms] and the same phrase at Bjbp *Jóms* 2/4^{I}; *Korm* 85/1–2 *dunði djúpra benja dǫgg* [the dew of deep wounds [BLOOD] rushed] and the same wording in *Heið* 2/3–4, where it is not, however, likely to be original (see *Heið* 2 and Note to [All] there).

Saga writers' most valuable and most commonly used method of integration was undoubtedly the dialogue incorporating a question-and-answer routine. Typically, the prose narrative, couched in the third person, describes a particular scene of action involving one or more protagonists, and a minor character then asks the main character a question, often in direct speech, to which the latter answers in a stanza, usually in *dróttkvætt* metre, that forms his direct response to his interlocutor. This format can be varied or expanded: the speaker of poetry may continue his recital beyond a single stanza by speaking one or more additional stanzas, linked by short prose connecting clauses, such as *ok enn kvað hann* [and again he said]. This sort of device allows the compiler to present several stanzas uttered by his character on the same topic as a kind of skaldic riff.

Some of the most obvious and most transparent uses of the question-and-answer method are almost unmotivated by the saga writer, especially when they are presented as requests for information. In *Heiðarvíga saga* Tindr Hallkelsson's brother Illugi asks him how many men participated in the Battle on the Heath, giving him the opportunity to recite two stanzas (*Heið* 13–14) in reply. There is a similarly clumsy introduction to *Heið* 15–17, three stanzas attributed to Eiríkr viðsjá, after a question from an unnamed man, who plays no other part in the narrative, about the course of the battle.[46] In *Grettis saga* the hero's brother Þorsteinn drómundr [Dromon] asks Grettir to tell him how he overcame a berserk, and the latter readily obliges with a vivid stanza (*Gr* 29).

The question-and-answer method of integrating poetry into a prose context is at its most effective when combined with a motivating dramatic background narrative. This occurs when a sequence of prose questions leads to a set of stanzas that stage an apparently extempore response of one or more characters to a series of events. The most developed and memorable example of this technique occurs in chapters 18, 19 and 22 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, when the peaceable farmer Þórarinn svarti [the Black] Þórólfsson finds himself embroiled in a local dispute in which he ends up killing an important man, Þorbjǫrn digri [the Stout] Ormsson, and so incurring the enmity of the region's most powerful chieftain, Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson. In chapters 18 and 19, as has been mentioned already in Chapter 1, the prose text represents Þórarinn as seeking help from various relatives for the lawsuit that he expects Snorri *goði* will soon bring against him. When he comes home from the fight his mother, Geirríðr, is at the door to ask him how he got on, and this sets him off on the first stanza of the sequence, introduced by *Þórarinn kvað þá*

46 Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative*. Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations 8 (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1991), pp. 182–94 suggests all Eiríkr's seven stanzas on the Battle on the Heath cited in *Heið* may have originally belonged to a *flokkr* on the subject.

vísu [Þórarinn then spoke a stanza]. His mother returns fire with the important question of whether he is in fact announcing the killing of Þorbjǫrn, and Þórarinn's affirmative reply comes in the form of a second stanza. The narrative then has Þórarinn visit a number of his relatives and supporters in their homes, each of whom asks him for news and receives it in the form of a stanza. There are seventeen stanzas in all in the episode, which bears the name *Máhlíðingamál* [the Mávahlíð affair] in the prose text.[47]

The *Máhlíðingavísur* 'Stanzas about the People of Mávahlíð' constitute the longest sequence of stanzas on a single topic transmitted in sagas of Icelanders, and a number of scholars have held that they most probably began life as parts of a unitary poem.[48] Support for this view is provided by the fact that they were named and partially cited in *Landnámabók*[49] and a couplet attributed to Þórarinn máhlíðingr is quoted in the *Háttatal* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*.[50]

Another example of the staging of a set of stanzas that at least give the appearance of having originally been a unit is the episode of *Grettis saga*[51] in which Vermundr inn mjóvi [the Slender] Þorgrímsson comes home from the assembly and questions his wife Þorbjǫrg about why, in his absence, she had saved Grettir's life when he was about to be hanged by the farmers of Ísafjörður. Vermundr's questioning of his wife is conducted in prose, and, when he turns to Grettir, he addresses him directly: '"Lítit lagðisk nú fyrir þik, þvílíkr garpr sem þú ert, er vesalmenni skyldu taka þik, ok fer svá jafnan óeirðarmǫnnum'.[52] This unsympathetic assessment is then made to provoke the first of the four stanzas of the second part of Grettir's *ævikviða* (*Gr* 39–42), which is staged as a series of questions from Vermundr and answers from Grettir. The use of the question-and-answer technique here has the effect of allowing Grettir to explain his behaviour to Vermundr while at

47 *ÍF* 4, p. 58.

48 For a discussion and references, see Kate Heslop's Introduction to the *Máhlíðingavísur* (*Máv*) in *SkP* V's forthcoming edition of the stanzas from *Eyrbyggja saga*.

49 *ÍF* 1, p. 115.

50 This is *Máv* 1/1–2^{V} (*Eb* 3), which Snorri gives as an example of *bragarmál* [poetic speech]; see *SnE* 2007, 8.

51 Ch. 52, *ÍF* 7, pp. 166–72. This particular example of the question-and-answer technique together with three of the four stanzas that accompany it, may well have been an invention of the author of *Grettis saga*, for a different version of the episode is recorded in *Fóstbræðra saga* (*ÍF* 6, pp. 121–2), and in this version there is no discussion between Vermundr and Grettir, and only one of the stanzas (*Gr* 41 = *Fbr* 1) is cited.

52 *ÍF* 7, p. 170: ['There was little price paid for you then, such a champion as you are, when wretched people were able to seize you; but so it always goes for reckless men'.]

the same time offering a flattering justification of Þorbjǫrg's magnanimity, presented by means of an elaborate mythological play on her name.[53]

The widespread use of question-and-answer dialogue poetry in sagas of Icelanders,[54] beginning amongst the earliest of them, such as *Heiðarvíga saga*, prompts a query about its likely origins. It might be claimed that such a technique of integrating prose and poetry is a natural compositional device that could arise without any specific model, and that may indeed be plausible in the medieval Icelandic context, thinking of the way in which question-and-answer dialogue between mythic or legendary figures is used in much poetry in eddic metres, both in the poetry of the Codex Regius collection and in *fornaldarsögur*.[55] However, another source of influence, which may have been as significant for the thirteenth-century writers of sagas of Icelanders, many of whom were probably clerics or men who had had some school education and training, is likely to have been the Latin and vernacular schoolroom. The use of question-and-answer dialogue as a teaching technique was fundamental to the medieval curriculum, following its pervasive use in the Latin grammar of Aelius Donatus,[56] and was widely employed in elementary as well as more advanced school books and in encyclopedic summaries of Christian doctrine, such as the *Elucidarius*, which was well known in Iceland, having been among the earliest translated works out of Latin.[57] While the pedagogical use of the technique was cut-and-dried in that it reinforced the authority of the teacher who asked the questions and often also provided the answers, it was capable of adaptation to less rigid textual situations.

53 The two elements of Þorbjǫrg's name, *Þórr* <god> + *bjǫrg* 'help, deliverance' are made to refer (*Gr* 40/5–8, 42/1–4) to the myth of the god Þórr's grasping a rowan tree growing on the bank of the swollen river Vimur that he had to cross on his way to the abode of the giant Geirrøðr. For the myth, which is said to explain why the rowan can be called Þórr's salvation, see *SnE* 1998, I, pp. 24–30, Anthony Faulkes trans., *Snorri Sturluson Edda* (London and Rutland, Vermont, 1987), pp. 81–6 and the *Þórsdrápa* of Eilífr Goðrúnarson (Eil *Þdr*^{III}).

54 Question and answer dialogue does occur from time to time in kings' sagas, especially when stanzas are cited in non-authenticating mode, but it is not very common. It occurs quite frequently in *fornaldarsögur*, however.

55 See Andreas Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 46 (1902), 189–284 and the discussion in the Introduction to *SkP* VIII, pp. lxxx–lxxxi.

56 On the nature and status of Donatus' grammatical works, see 'Aelius Donatus, *Ars Minor*, *Ars Major*, *Life of Virgil*, ca. 350', in Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (eds and trans.), *Medieval Grammar & Rhetoric. Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 82–103.

57 On the influence of the Icelandic *Elucidarius* and its use of question-and-answer dialogue, see Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad (eds), *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation* (Reykjavík, 1989), pp. xxi–xxvi.

The narrative frames of two sections of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (c. 1225) are based upon this model, with Gylfi questioning the triad of Æsir from Troy in *Gylfaginning* [The Delusion of Gylfi] and Bragi interrogating Ægir about skaldic poetry at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál*. Although the narrative frames are sometimes forgotten within the texts of each of these sections, they surface from time to time. However, the question-and-answer method is fundamental in *Skáldskaparmál* to the exposition of the stylistic devices of the kenning and *heiti*, where questions are routinely asked, such as 'Hvernig skal kenna skip?' [How should a ship be designated?], and answers are routinely given in the form of one or more poetic examples (*dæmi*), as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. *Háttatal* [Enumeration of Verse-forms] also begins its text in the manner of the schoolroom, without bothering to identify the speaking voices: 'Hvat eru hættir skáldskapar? Þrent. Hverir? Setning, leyfi, fyrirboðning' [What are the verse-forms of poetry like? There are three. Which ones? In accordance with rules, licence, prohibition.][58]

It seems quite likely that compilers of sagas of Icelanders drew on two traditions of dialogic composition when working out how to integrate poetry and prose elements into their *prosimetra*. On the one hand they had access to the native traditions of dialogic composition in eddic poetry, where characters of gods and legendary heroes engage in direct discourse, often incorporating a question-and-answer format, as in *Hárbarðsljóð* [The Song of Hárbarðr] or *Lokasenna* [The Flyting of Loki]. This tradition was carried through into the *fornaldarsaga* genre where poetry in a similar mode to the legendary poems of the Poetic Edda is given a narrative prose frame. The schoolroom question-and-answer dialogue importantly provided both an example of a means of inserting individual stanzas or sets of stanzas into a prose text, in the form of poetic examples, and the actual mechanics for doing so, and this may well have been decisive in the development of *prosimetrum* in sagas of Icelanders.

58 The Icelandic text is from Anthony Faulkes' edition of *Háttatal* (*SnE* 2007, p. 3), while the translation is my own.

5

Subjects of Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders

Having investigated the various strategies by which authors of sagas of Icelanders communicated with their audiences using the prosimetric form, the present chapter considers the subject matter of the poetry itself and the likely reasons why particular poetic subjects were chosen by saga authors for embedding in their prose texts. It has often been argued that the poetry in sagas of Icelanders allowed saga authors to address aspects of the emotional lives of their characters in a far more detailed and direct way than they felt able to do in the hard-boiled impersonal style of their narrative prose.[1] Until now, however, there has been no comprehensive assessment of the actual subjects that the poetry cited in these sagas addresses, nor of the relative popularity of some topics over others, nor indeed of the frequent close connections between topics, nor of emphases or unexpected absences within the range of poetic topics compared with the broad coverage of subjects in the saga prose. This chapter initiates an investigation into the subjects of poetry in sagas of Icelanders, an investigation that has the capacity to go much more broadly and in greater depth into the mental world of these sagas than the compass of this book allows.

The latter part of the chapter comprises an Appendix, which presents a set of topics and lists (arranged by saga in alphabetical order) that gives as accurate a summary as possible of the subject matter of each stanza (or set of stanzas) found in the corpus of sagas of Icelanders containing poetry (see Chapter 1, **Table 1** for a list of these). It is actually rather difficult to give an accurate summary of the contents of these stanzas, particularly those (a majority) in skaldic metres, and there are several reasons for this. It is frequently hard to identify the dominant theme or topic of each stanza or group of stanzas, because individual stanzas quite often address several

[1] See, among many others to hold this view, which is incontrovertibly correct, Vésteinn Ólason, trans. Andrew Wawn, *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders (*Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 124–9 and further references there.

topics and interweave them, typically making use of fragmented skaldic syntax and intercalary clauses. The choice of heading under which to classify each stanza thus involves an element of subjectivity in deciding the theme of greatest importance in the stanza in question. In some stanzas, where more than one main topic can be identified, what seems to be the most important one has been selected. In cases where more than one subject seems almost equally important, cross-references to other sections indicate subsidiary or possibly alternative categories. Generally speaking, the issues broached in intercalary clauses, though often important in themselves, particularly as indicators of the speaker's state of mind, have not been selected as major topics here. For example, most references to the speaker of a stanza as a poet promoting Óðinn's ale have not been collected, because they are often stereotyped fillers that are not the main subjects of the individual stanzas in which they occur.

It is also sometimes difficult to give an account of the meaning of a stanza without reference to its prose context. In a few cases it is virtually impossible, especially if the stanza is fragmentary or enigmatic in some way. This difficulty occurs partly because the poetic texts are often allusive and obscure or because there is uncertainty among editors and textual scholars about the identity of the referents of some kennings, which are never part of the text itself, but have to be inferred from it. There are also many instances where there is a discrepancy, sometimes of a major kind, between the apparent meaning of a stanza, considered on its own, and what the prose text claims to be its meaning, as we have already noted in Chapter 4. This naturally leads to uncertainty about the meaning of a stanza or set of stanzas. The summaries of stanza contents in these lists do not usually take account of what the prose texts claim to be their meanings, nor of any inconsistencies or mismatches between the poetry and the saga prose contexts into which they have been placed. However, where it is necessary to include information provided only in the prose text in order to make minimal sense of a stanza, this has been added in square brackets beside the summary.

The Categories

There are twelve categories in the lists below, Personal Circumstances (A), Supernatural Events, Curses and Premonitions (B), Dreams (C), Male-Female Relations (D), Killings, Battles and Duels (E), Outlawry (F), Old Age (G), Death (H), Grief (I), Generosity, Gift-giving and Friendship (J), Formal Poetry (K) and Miscellaneous (L). When I began this exercise, I did not have a predetermined list of categories in my mind, but they formed naturally as the material accumulated. Two of them, A and L, are admittedly categories that cover a range of topics, some of which, if the sagas had provided more

numerous examples, could have constituted categories in their own right.[2] However, because each topic provided only a small number of examples from the corpus, it has had to be subsumed under either A or L. The distinction between them is that category A includes topics that express an individual character's personal predicament or circumstances, such as *Gr* 8, in which the young Grettir expresses his resentment at being asked by his father to tend geese, whereas category L records an event or external circumstance that has impacted on a saga character, such as *Hallfr* 9–13, five stanzas that express Hallfreðr's reaction to King Óláfr Tryggvason's requirement that he convert to Christianity. The distinction between a personal predicament and an external event that affects someone is clearly to some extent a matter of perspective, so the separation of entries in categories A and L is not watertight.

There is another category, Formal Poetry (K), that is unlike the others in that the poetry listed within it is not classified by specific subject but rather by the formal genres of *drápa* [long praise-poem with a refrain], *erfidrápa* [memorial poem] and *ævikviða* [life-poem, autobiography]. These generic identifiers themselves reflect expected topics, however, which include praise of an individual, alive or dead, and, in the case of the *ævikviða*, which is not a courtly genre, a review of a man's life course, usually with a list of the people he has killed and the fights he has fought.[3] Many of the examples listed in category K are fragments, mere place-markers signalling the extradiagetic existence of formal poetry attributed to a saga character, which the saga author wishes the audience to be mindful of without delaying the narrative for a full recital (if indeed the complete poem existed or was actually known to him). Category K overlaps in part with the lists of formal poems mentioned in sagas of Icelanders in Chapter 2, **Tables 7a–c**, but with this difference: that category K does not include poetry referred to but not cited in the text of sagas of Icelanders, whereas in **Tables 7a–c** these non-cited works are listed alongside those from which some text is actually quoted.

2 For example, *Gr* 17–18 and *Harð* 8–12 are both examples of the topic of mound-breaking, in which the protagonists break into a long-dead hero's burial mound and steal treasure or weapons from him. This topic is also discussed in Chapter 4 and associated there with similar motifs in *fornaldarsögur*. Had there been more examples of this subject in the poetic corpus of sagas of Icelanders, it might have formed a category in its own right in the present list.

3 *Ævikviður* appear in some *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. *Gautreks saga*, *Qrvar-Odds saga*) as well as in late sagas of Icelanders such as *Grettis saga*. On this genre and its characteristics, see the Introduction to *SkP* VIII, 1 (2017), pp. lxxxi–lxxxii and the discussion in Chapter 4 above.

Distribution of Topics by Category

It will come as no surprise to anyone who has read even a small number of sagas of Icelanders that the most populous category, according to the analysis presented here, is category E, Killings, Battles and Duels, followed by category D, Male-Female Relations and Male-Male Relations consequent upon them. These two categories together constitute more than half of all topics identified in these lists. Something that is also apparent on even a superficial review of categories D and E is how closely related their topics are in many cases, in that a heterosexual liaison, often outside of marriage, leads not only to conflict of a verbal nature between men, particularly in the form of an exchange of insults, but also, in many instances, to physical aggression and actual fighting, whether in the form of a duel or some kind of brawl or battle. This connection applies particularly to the sagas of poets, which are important sources for these lists because they contain a great deal of poetry, much of it on these very topics. The relationship between categories D and E has been much discussed in earlier studies.[4] Later in this chapter, Jochens' contention, in her article on gender relations in the poets' sagas, that the 'analysis of gender relations in these narratives [the poets' sagas] has shown rivalry between men to be more dominating than love'[5] will be considered further while analysing the topics that specifically bear on the subject of heterosexual love.

Given the characteristics we have identified in earlier chapters as distinctive of many sagas containing significant quantities of poetry, namely that they follow a biographical format rather than being centrally structured around local feuds, it is perhaps unexpected that category E is so prominent in these lists. However, the biographies of poets and outlaws contain many stanzas in which these characters proclaim and celebrate their killings of individual enemies, one after another, whether these are personal rivals or hostile individuals they encounter in their travels inside and outside Iceland. The stanzas of this type by Egill Skalla-Grímsson and Grettir Ásmundarson swell category E, but there are others from sagas such as *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Hávarðar saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Svarfdœla saga* that are more conventional in terms of the structure of sagas whose main subject is regional feuds, in that they detail killings that occur in the course of these feuds.

Two further categories that show a close interrelationship are B, Supernatural Events, Curses and Premonitions and C, Dreams. Category B

4 See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 25–49, at pp. 44–5 and Jenny Jochens, 'Representations of Skalds in the Sagas 2: Gender Relations', in Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas*, pp. 309–32.

5 'Representations of Skalds', p. 331.

has a wider reach than category C and includes stanzas spoken by a variety of supernatural beings (troll-women, giants, *draugar*, sorcerers and prophetesses) as well as apparently inanimate objects, such as a stone, a cloak and a headless corpse. It also includes curses brought down on individuals by speakers who invoke pre-Christian deities (e.g. *Eg* 28–9) or refer to the ability of the pagan gods to harm humans (e.g. the poetess Steinunn in *Nj* 40–1). Dreams in Icelandic sagas also often present supernatural events, even though they are experienced by individuals from the world of here and now, and they always reveal information about future happenings, usually of a threatening or disturbing nature, in which the dreamer will become involved. Hence dreams can be seen as a special class of premonition, one that the individual character experiences in his or her inner life.

Skaldic poetry is particularly suited to the exploration of dreamlike states, because it can juggle words expressing a speaker's representations of different perceptions and sensations within the compass of a stanza in a way that mimics the changeable scenarios of human dreams. In some of the examples in category C the speaker of a stanza is the character who has a dream, usually portentous, which he relates to another character who has asked him why he is behaving in a distressed or unusual manner. In *Glúm* 5–6, for example, Víga-Glúmr tells his son Már that he has had two dreams presaging battle and then speaks two stanzas describing them. The first involves him and his enemy Þórarinn throwing whetstones at one another, while in the second he sees 'mikla goðreið' [a great riding of divine beings] and valkyries pouring forth blood around men's bodies. In other cases, supernatural beings themselves speak poetry to humans. In most such instances, such as in *Nj* 46, where a threatening figure named Járngrímr [Iron-hooded] appears to Flosi in a dream and speaks a stanza, the prose text carries a description of Flosi's dream and then cites a stanza which is presented as the supernatural figure's utterance.

The sequence of twenty dream stanzas involving Gísli's dream-woman (or dream-women)[6] in *Gísla saga* (*Gísl* 16–22, 25–7, 29–38) is unique in the sagas of Icelanders for its internalisation of the speaking supernatural being within the frame of the dream stanzas. Gísli begins to describe his first dream to his wife (*Gísl* 16) and then, in the following stanza, the dream-woman begins to speak to him directly in the stanza's second *helmingr*. She continues

6 The prose text clearly presents two dream-women, 'draumkona in betra' [the better dream-woman] and 'draumkona in verri' [the worse dream-woman] (cf. ch. 22, *ÍF* 6, p. 70), but it is not fully clear from the poetry alone that the dreamer, Gísli, perceives two separate women rather than changing aspects of a single one; see Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 162–3; P. S. Langeslag, 'The Dream Women of *Gísla saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 81 (2009), 47–72.

to address the dreamer, Gísli, in direct speech in a number of stanzas in the sequence (*Gísl* 17, 18, 19, 27, 29). The sequence of dream-woman stanzas in *Gísla saga* is unprecedented in Old Icelandic literature for its use of dialogue between the dreamer and the dream-figure *within the poetry*. Even the most complex of the dream sequences in *Íslendinga saga* [The Saga of Icelanders], the dreams of Jóreiðr from Miðjumdalur,[7] does not use the literary device of placing both dreamer and dream-character within the poetry in the way the composer or composers of the dream-woman stanzas of *Gísla saga* do.

This technique is comparable to that found in the dream-vision genre attested in much late antique and medieval European literature, in which a human dreamer encounters figures who speak to him within the setting of the dream. The *Roman de la Rose* in Old French and the many Middle English dream poems, such as the anonymous *Pearl* and several of Geoffrey Chaucer's works, including *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, attest to the late medieval popularity of the dream-vision and its literary flexibility in presenting altered states of consciousness of the human dreamer in interaction with the dreamworld Other.

Categories F, Outlawry, G Old Age, H Death and I Grief are surprisingly small, given how important at least the first of these is to the three sagas of outlaws and to other characters facing sentences of outlawry, such as Þórarinn svarti 'the Black' Þórólfsson in *Eyrbyggja saga* and Þormóðr Bersason in *Fóstbrœðra saga*. Almost all the poetic examples in which saga characters express their reactions to the sentence of outlawry are statements of defiance of their enemies mixed with the threat of retaliation. The stiff upper lip is also evident in *Gr* 30 and *Harð* 14.

A similarly reserved reaction to death and grief is expressed in categories H and I, along with understated deep sorrow, as in *Eg* 17, on the death of Egill's brother Þórólfr, or concern about the consequences of disclosure of a

[7] Jón Jóhannesson *et al.* (eds), *Sturlunga saga*. 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1946), I, pp. 519–22 (*Íslendinga saga*, ch. 190). In this dream sequence, Jóreiðr and the dream-woman (*draumkona*) converse with one another in prose, but not in verse. It is only the dream-woman who speaks in verse. Even though there are many dream stanzas recorded in *Íslendinga saga* and other contemporary sagas, the same technique is used there as is used in all sagas of Icelanders with the exception of *Gísla saga*: the prose text tells who dreamed a dream and in what circumstances; the figure from the dream speaks a stanza or stanzas. Congruence in a different direction occurs in *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr*, where the dreamer enters a state in which he seems to turn into the protagonist of the dream he is experiencing and, in the persona of that figure, a poet, composes two poems about the events he has experienced in the dream; cf. Ralph O'Connor, 'Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, III (2012), 474–512.

killing in *Gísl* 10, in which Gísli counsels a servant to keep silent about the death of Þorgrímr, while *Gísl* 6 and 7, on Auðr's copious tears shed for her dead brother Vésteinn, suggest that women were conventionally presented as liable to give freer expression to their grief than men were.[8] This restraint in the expression of sorrow was probably also bound up with other typical reactions to death in early Icelandic society, particularly when, as often, it was combined with a resolution to embark on a revenge killing, for which restraint was also traditionally enjoined, as an aphorism cited in *Grettis saga* has it: 'Only a slave takes vengeance at once, a coward never'.[9] This aphorism about how one should conduct the business of revenge reveals a kind of distanced aestheticism in the face of behaviour potentially leading to death, a kind of self-inspection carried out in order to assess whether one passes muster in adversity. The second *helmingr* of Gísli Súrsson's final stanza (*Gísl* 40) expresses this complex of emotions succinctly:

> Vel hygg ek, þótt eggjar
> ítrslegnar mik bíti
> (þá gaf sínum sveini)
> sverðs (minn faðir
> herðu).
>
> Ek hygg vel, þótt ítrslegnar eggjar sverðs bíti mik; faðir minn gaf sveini sínum þá herðu.
>
> I feel good, although fair-welded edges of the sword bite me; my father gave his son that toughness.

It would hardly have been justifiable to create the separate categories G, H, I and J were it not for the existence of *Egils saga* and its poetry. The ways in which stanzas from that saga populate a much greater range of categories than any other reveal the diversity of subjects it covers as well as the unique footprint of its poetry. The preoccupation with the ills of old age, its physical weaknesses and frustrations, particularly in matters of vengeance, appear both at the beginning (*Eg* 1) and ending (*Eg* 130–2) of this saga and in the long poem *Sonatorrek*. The only other saga characters to explore this topic in verse, at any rate, are Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson in his final stanza (*Glúm* 13) and Hólmgǫngu-Bersi Véleifsson in several stanzas

[8] See a similar association between weeping and the grief expressed by female characters in *Hallfr* 25 and *Vígl* 1.

[9] *Grettis saga*, ch. 15, *ÍF* 7, p. 44: 'Þræll einn þegar hefnisk, en argr aldri'. The implication is that a well-controlled man takes his time to plan and carry out a vengeance killing.

of *Kormáks saga* (*Korm* 40–1, 48, 50) lamenting his loss of prowess as an experienced dueller on account of his advancing age.[10] The old but crafty Ófeigr Skíðason in *Bandamanna saga* uses a semi-proverbial reference in *Band* 4 to the ills of old age as a cover for his own mental sharpness in conducting a lawsuit on his son's behalf. The topic of old age, both in these examples and in Egill's poetry generally, is also bound up with ideas of loss of status, social acceptance and reputation. It is also associated in men with the loss of virility and attractiveness to women.[11] In Egill's case it is his loss of status as a poet performing before noble patrons that causes him the greatest regret (*Eg* 131/5–8).

The focus of the poetry in *Egils saga* upon the topic of poetry itself is unparalleled in the other sagas of this corpus, even taking account of *Hallfreðar saga*'s debate on the merits and demerits of imagery derived from the pre-Christian and Christian religions respectively. In the verse associated with *Egils saga* poetry is a means of redeeming one's head from the danger of death (*Hǫfuðlausn*, *Eg* 34–54), a consolation for the loss of sons and for the poet's abandonment by Óðinn (*Sonatorrek*, *Eg* 72–96). The ability to compose poetry is impeded by grief (*Sonatorrek* 1–2, *Eg* 72–3) but grief (in the case of *Eg* 123 at hearing of the death of Arinbjǫrn) also gives rise to the memory of past success and reward:

> Þverra nú, þeirs þverrðu, þeiras hauks fyr handan
> þingbirtingar Ingva, háfjǫll digulsnjávi
> (hvar skalk mildra manna) jarðar gjǫrð við orðum
> mjaðveitar dag (leita), eyneglða mér heglðu?
>
> Nú þverra Ingva þingbirtingar, þeirs þverrðu dag mjaðveitar; hvar skalk leita mildra manna, þeiras heglðu háfjǫll hauks mér digulsnjávi fyr handan eyneglða gjǫrð jarðar við orðum?
>
> Now the bright ones of the assembly of Ingvi <sea-king> [(*lit*. 'assembly-bright ones of Ingvi') BATTLE > WARRIORS] grow less, they who made the daylight of the mead-trench [DRINKING HORN > SILVER] decrease; where am I to look for generous men, those who hail-showered my high

[10] *Korm* 48 is a memorable vignette of the elderly, bed-ridden Bersi left at home to look after the baby Halldórr Óláfsson, who had fallen out of his cradle. Both are incapable of doing anything about it: 'Veldr œska þér | en elli mér' [Childhood does this to you and old age to me]. The stanza is also in *Laxdœla saga* (*Laxd* 1), where it is much better contextualised.

[11] So *Eg* 130/3–4 and the prose text of *Eg* ch. 85; also many stanzas in *Vígl* in which aspersions are cast on Ketilríðr's old husband by her would-be lover Víglundr (*Vígl* 13/5–8, 14/5–8, 19, 20/1–4 and 24/1–4).

> mountains of the hawk [ARMS] with crucible-snow [SILVER] beyond the island-studded girdle of the earth [SEA] for my words?[12]

The world of Egill Skalla-Grímsson and the other poets of the *Íslendingasögur* who served foreign rulers is also reflected in categories J and K, which contain topics particularly appropriate to a courtly setting, including generosity, the touchtone of a patron's reputation, gift-giving and the ethical standard of reciprocity behind it, along with male friendship, the last-named only in the context of Egill's friendship with Arinbjǫrn Þórisson, a subject pursued particularly in the poetry of the A-text of the saga.[13] This sparing celebration of male friendship (female friendship is not registered) contrasts with the plentiful examples of male to male envy and hostility in category D, usually over women, and in category E, where the causes of conflict are multiple, though they can usually be traced to one or other of the triggers of medieval Icelandic feud.[14]

Some Further Issues

There are many further issues prompted by the evidence of the lists of poetic subjects compiled here that would repay analysis in greater depth. For reasons of space, this section of Chapter 5 confines itself to three of them: the nexus between heterosexual love and male rivalry; attitudes to fighting and conflict; and the overall complex of human states of mind that the poetry in sagas of Icelanders explores.

There is no doubt that the field of male-female relations is one of the most important topics of the poetry in sagas of Icelanders, though it is a field viewed from a largely masculine perspective, as very few of the characters who are presented as speaking poetry in these sagas are female. In Chapter 7 we shall see that women are allowed greater latitude as speakers of poetry in the youngest group of family sagas, including *Bárðar saga*, *Harðar saga*, *Njáls saga* and *Víglundar saga*, but for the most part female speakers do not have an independent poetic voice in sagas of Icelanders, even though relations between men and women play such an important part in sagas that contain poetry. This apparent contradiction is most extreme in the sagas of poets: the

12 There are similarities here with the Old English poem *The Wanderer*, especially ll. 37–48, in which a man who appears to have lost his patron remembers how he used to enjoy the privileges of the mead hall.

13 See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Verse and Prose in *Egils saga*', in Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (eds), *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*. The Viking Collection 18 (Odense, 2010), pp. 191–211 at p. 206.

14 See Appendix B, 'Examples of Conflict', in Jesse L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982), pp. 222–44.

only female character who is given a skaldic stanza to speak in any of the poets' sagas is Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga*, and she is only allowed a single *helmingr* (*Korm* 21), which is her reply to Kormákr's *helmingr* (*Korm* 20), in which he asks her whom she would prefer as her husband and she nominates him. Otherwise we rely on the male characters' poetry and the words of the authors of the prose texts to describe the feelings and general behaviour of the poets' women. This powerlessness and lack of agency ascribed to female characters underlies a striking and painful episode in *Hallfreðar saga*, in which Hallfreðr declaims *Hallfr* 18–21, a series of scurrilous stanzas slandering Kolfinna's husband Gríss and impugning their sexual relations, that he recites to her when they are together at some shieling huts, claiming outrageously that he had heard they were her own compositions. The prose text makes it clear that Kolfinna finds these stanzas distasteful, humiliating and dishonourable, but she evidently has no power to stop Hallfreðr speaking them or, ironically, attributing them to her.

As we noted earlier in this chapter, it has been argued, with some justice, that the so-called love stanzas in the poets' sagas and elsewhere are more about male rivalry over women and male to male aggression than they are about men's feelings of love for the women themselves. Even in the 'modern', probably fourteenth-century, romance of *Víglundar saga*, the young hero, Víglundr, is made to speak several stanzas (*Vígl* 4–5, 14, 21–2, 24) expressing hostile and jealous feelings for the other men to whom his beloved Ketilríðr is married off against her will. The emphasis on male rivalry over women reflects early Icelandic society's deeply held concerns about personal and familial honour, which included honour upheld or relinquished through a man's or a family's treatment of women.[15] Men could suffer dishonour and shame if the women for whom they were responsible at law engaged in extramarital sexual relations or if there was even a suggestion that they might be doing so. This is the rationale behind the stereotyped plots of the skald sagas, in which a poet falls in love with a woman who, for varying reasons, becomes the wife of another man. When the poet-lover persists with his attentions to the woman, hostility immediately erupts in the form of exchanges of insults, petty skirmishes, and often full-blown fighting between the husband and would-be lover and their respective supporters, sometimes taking the form of duels.[16]

15 There is now a copious literature on this subject; see, among others, Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland. An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 86, 102; Byock, *Feud*, pp. 227–8, 235–8; Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære. Studier i islændingesagaerne* (Aarhus, 1993), pp. 187–248.

16 It is probably significant of a new, romantic attitude to love in *Víglundar saga* that the hero, Víglundr, is dissuaded by his brother Trausti (*Vígl* 15–16) from

The evidence of category D in combination with category E certainly supports the close association between heterosexual relations and male to male hostility, although there is also a small number of stanzas that qualify as expressions of love not directly associated with male rivalry. They range from the representation of true love in the face of adversity in a number of stanzas of *Víglundar saga* to *Eb* 24's lyrical expression of Bjǫrn breiðvíkingakappi's wish to prolong the day on which he has to part from his lover,[17] to the first ten stanzas of *Kormáks saga*, which are surely the most erotic poetry in Old Norse literature. Here the prose and poetry in combination exude a voyeuristic interest on the part of both male and female characters in the sexualized human body seen and described from a distance.

One of the most interesting aspects of the stanzas in category D is that many of them revel in the tantalising danger area, as it were, between licit and illicit sexual relations. A group of stanzas in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* (*BjH* 3–12) is said to have been composed while Bjǫrn is on a visit to his love interest, Oddný, and her husband Þórðr, allowing him to flaunt his and Oddný's mutual desire right under her husband's nose. Another example of a similar kind is the sequence in *Kormáks saga* (*Korm* 59–63) which tells (from the male point of view) of the frustrations the lovers experience when, at a remote location, they share a bed separated by a wooden partition. And absence in these stories certainly seems to make the heart of the lover-poet grow fonder: about to leave Iceland for Norway, and out of Kolfinna's reach both physically and as a marriage partner, Hallfreðr claims in *Hallfr* 4/6, 7, 8: 'unnum nú [kenning for WOMAN] nær betr, an væri heitin mér' [I now love [the woman] almost better than if she were promised to me].

The poetry on fighting and conflict in section E reveals a complex of attitudes and emotions. Many of the stanzas in this section are presented in the saga prose as having been occasioned by a question or series of questions from another character in the narrative who has not been involved in the action, using the question-and-answer method of staging the poetry discussed in Chapter 4. In a number of cases (e.g. *Eg* 122, *Fbr* 18, *Gr* 66–70, *Harð* 16, *Háv* 7, *Korm* 46, *Þórð* 7–9) this method elicits a stanza or stanzas in response in which the speaker gives details of the battle, including the numbers of the slain and wounded and sometimes the personal names of the deceased. Occasionally, the name of the place where the fight occurred or other salient details are also given. Stanzas of this kind have some similarities to the

attacking Ketilríðr's supposed husband Þórðr on the ground that he must be beyond reproach if he is to win her in marriage.

17 *Eb* 24/1, 2, 4: 'Vit mundum vilja þenna dag lengstan í miðli gul*s viðar ok blás' [We two would wish this day [to be] the longest between the golden wood and the blue].

authenticating mode of citation, which is characteristic of the use of skaldic poetry in historical works.

Many stanzas in category E describe fights in graphic physical detail (e.g. *Eg* 64, *Gr* 29, *Heið* 1–2), while others are concerned to offer some self-justification on the speaker's part for a killing or to set the record straight as to how it occurred (*BjH* 25, *Eb* 3–19 (*Máv*), *Gr* 11, *Háv* 9–12); still others record a speaker's satisfaction or relief at having completed a revenge killing (*Dpl* 2 and 3, *Eg* 2, *Háv* 15) or his sense of urgency at the prospect of taking vengeance (*Fbr* 2). A particularly aggressive character, Grettir Ásmundarson, can claim prudence as a virtue when he refuses to fight against overwhelming numbers of opponents (*Gr* 27, 57–8), while a less experienced fighter such as Kormákr Ǫgmundarson blames his inferior or magically blunted sword (*Korm* 29–32, 34–5) for his lack of success in his duel against Bersi. The diversity of topics and emphases within category E doubtless reflects the central importance and ubiquity of physical violence and aggression in medieval Icelandic social life as a measure of a man's self-worth.

The complexion of the inner world of sagas of Icelanders, as revealed through their poetry, is a sombre one on the whole. Very few of the stanzas listed here express a speaker's happiness or joy. An exception is *Band* 5, in which Ófeigr Skíðason rejoices in having defeated the eight chieftains who have tried to destroy his son, but here Ófeigr's pleasure springs from others' pain. In category A and elsewhere, most of the personal predicaments that are the subjects of poetry involve negative emotions: homesickness (*Bárð* 1), the pain of separation from a lover (*Bárð* 2; *Eb* 24, 29–31; *Korm* 59–60; a majority of the stanzas in *Vígl*), anger and resentment at having been let down by others, especially kinsmen (*Band* 1; *Eg* 127, 129; *Gr* 8–10; *Harð* 2–4 and 13); concern for the effects of physical weakness, deformity or disability upon one's performance and therefore upon one's reputation (*Fbr* 8; *Fbr* 21; *Fbr* 23–4; *Gr* 1 and 4; *Gr* 26; *Gr* 45); deprivation and disappointment at the way things have turned out (*Eir* 1–2; *Glúm* 1, *Glúm* 9; *Gr* 12). The emotion of fear is rarely the subject of a stanza except when it is identified in a servant or a foreigner (*Eb* 12–13, *Fbr* 22; but see *Dpl* 1, *Glúm* 10–11), and this probably indicates the predominant association of the concept of masculine competence in all areas of adult life with self-control and the concealment of strong emotions, behaviour that is inferentially considered the preserve of medieval Icelandic society's elite. The fear of disgrace or dishonour is expressed in many stanzas, especially in sections D and E. A more positive complex of emotions can be detected in stanzas that express a speaker's grim satisfaction at having performed well in adversity, especially in fighting (so *Dpl* 3; *Eb* 3, 8, 10; *Eg* 2; *Fbr* 26), and at having made a good end (so *Gísl* 40, quoted above). There are sometimes touches of wry humour in these stanzas (e.g. *Korm* 5/7–8 and 6/5–8, possibly *Korm* 7–8) and an awareness of the grotesque consequences of personal conflict (see *Fbr* 27; *Korm* 22), but they

are very often bound up with the business of disgracing and humiliating one's enemies.

Appendix: The Subjects of Stanzas in Sagas of Icelanders

A. Personal Circumstances

[circumstances not classifiable under specific topics listed below]

Band 1 Ófeigr Skíðason complains about his son Oddr's profligacy and lack of attention to the laws as well as his own remoteness from him.

Band 2 Ófeigr flatters Egill Skúlason as an intelligent man while presenting himself as an old stay-at-home.

Band 3 Ófeigr castigates the confederates for their greed and injustice and states he would be happy for them to lose their wealth and their reputations.

Bárð 1 Helga, daughter of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, complains in Greenland of homesickness for Snæfellsnes.

Bárð 2 Helga laments being separated against her will from her lover, Miðfjarðar-Skeggi.

Eg 127 Egill Skalla-Grímsson complains that his son has cheated him and worn a precious cloak without permission.

Eg 129 Egill claims that a relative has failed to support him (*brásk mér*) in a dispute about land.

Eir 1–2 Þórhallr veiðimaðr [Hunter] complains that his expectations of wine and prosperity in Vínland have been unfulfilled and decides to turn back his part of the expedition.

Fbr 8 Þormóðr kolbrúnarskáld [Kolbrún's poet] Bersason reflects on an injury to his right arm, after an attack by the sorceress Gríma's servant, which causes him to fight left-handed thereafter.

Fbr 9 Þormóðr gives an account of the punishment Gríma's daughter Þórdís inflicts on him (excruciating pain in the eyes) for recycling poetry, originally intended for Þorbjǫrg Kolbrún Glúmsdóttir, as if it was intended for her.

Fbr 19 Þormóðr describes his uneasy reaction to King Óláfr Haraldsson's requirement from him of both royal service and vengeance for his foster-brother, Þorgeirr.

Fbr 21 Þormóðr reports that he was criticised in Greenland for his supposed inability to handle a harpoon.

Fbr 22 The stanza describes the physical effects of fear on Þormóðr's servant Egill.

Gísl 4 Gísli reflects on the destruction by fire of his family farm in Norway and predicts vengeance to come.

Glúm 9 Glúmr complains that he has been forced to move yet again and that his estate is now smaller. [This is because a landslide destroyed some of his farm buildings at Myrkárdalur.]

Gr 1 Ǫnundr tréfótr [Wooden leg] reflects on the loss of his leg and how it has diminished his self-worth.

Gr 4 Similar theme to *Gr* 1 but recited on Ǫnundr's voyage to Iceland.

Gr 5 Ǫnundr contrasts the land he is allocated in Iceland with the glories of his family property in former days in Norway.

Gr 8 The young Grettir expresses his resentment at being asked by his father to tend geese and says he will wring their necks.

Gr 9 Grettir expresses resentment at his father Ásmundr's request for him to massage his back and indicates how he will instead inflict pain on him by scratching his back with a wool-comb.

Gr 10 Ásmundr's angry reaction to his son's flaying of his prized horse Kengála.

Gr 12 Grettir complains about how poorly provisioned he is for his first voyage abroad but praises his mother, Ásdís, for her gift to him of her family heirloom, the sword Jǫkulsnautr.

Gr 26 Grettir predicts Barði Guðmundarson will suffer a throat-wound and recalls how he himself was shamed by being throttled in his youth.

Gr 45 After his first encounter with the giant Hallmundr, Grettir reflects on his own lesser strength and also laments his lack of brotherly support on that occasion.

Gr 59 Grettir on the run reveals his identity to a young woman.

Gr 62–3 Grettir ridicules the men at the Hegranes *þing* who have failed to recognise him through his disguise.

Gunnl 4 Gunnlaugr warns a man not to withhold money from him and says his nickname *ormstunga* [Serpent-tongue] is fully justified.

Gunnl 5 Gunnlaugr announces he will go travelling to visit other rulers after having been rewarded with gold for his loyal service to King Aðalráðr of England.

Nj 31 Þráinn Sigfússon speaks this defiant couplet after escaping the reach of Hákon jarl Sigurðarson in his ship Gamminn [the Vulture].

B. Supernatural Events, Curses and Premonitions

Bárð 3 The troll-woman Hetta speaks a *miðvísa* [fishing-ground verse], indicating the location of a good place to catch fish.

Bárð 4 An unidentified voice (Hetta) speaks an incantation designed to cause a man (Ingjaldr) to become lost at sea.

Bárð 5 A man whose sheep have been attacked by a troll-woman, Torfár-Kolla, tells how he wrestles with her and kills her.

Bergb 1–12 Twelve stanzas recited to two men by a giant being called Hallmundr, whose activities, along with those of other paranormal beings, cause storms and volcanic eruptions. In the final stanza the men are enjoined to remember the poem on pain of death; one of them remembers, the other forgets and dies [see also section K].

BjH 33 Þórðr Kolbeinsson entreats 'all spirits of shield-howling' to bring about his victory in his last battle with Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi.

Eg 28–9 Egill invokes pre-Christian gods to drive his enemies, King Eiríkr blóðøx [Blood-axe] Haraldsson and Queen Gunnhildr, away from Norway.

Eg 34 Egill alleges that Atli the Short has used sorcery to blunt his sword [see also under section E].

Eg 70 Egill advises how to carve runes responsibly and describes how a young girl has been afflicted by runic magic carved by a local farmer's son.

Eb 31 A storm caused by a woman's sorcery prevents Bjǫrn breiðvíkingakappi [Champion of the People of Breiðavík] from reaching his lover and forces him to shelter in a cave.

Eb 32 A severed head predicts a bloody battle on the scree named Geirvǫr.

Eb 36–7 An old woman predicts the death of her foster-son from a monstrous, troll-like bull, Glæsir.

Gr 2 Some vikings curse Ǫnundr tréfótr.

Gr 43–4 Grettir describes his first encounter with the mysterious giant Hallmundr disguised as a person named Loptr.

Gr 60–1 Grettir inscribes on a rune stick [according to the prose saga] an account of his experience in the cave of the Bárðardalur giants.

Gr 70 In his last stanza spoken before his death, Grettir acknowledges that an old woman's sorcery was able to defeat him where conventional weapons of his enemies could not.

Harð 6 Hǫrðr's sister Þorbjǫrg vows to be the cause of the death of her brother's killer if he dies before she does.

Harð 10 Sóti the dead viking predicts that the gold ring Hǫrðr steals from him will cause his death and that of all associated with him [see also section L].

Harð 18 Þorbjǫrg learns that her brother Hǫrðr had been struck from behind while standing still, and attributes his death to an act of cruel sorcery (*galdr grimmra galdra*).

Harð 19 A sacrificial stone within the *blóthús* [sacrificial place] of Hǫrðr's killer, Þorsteinn gullknappr [Gold-button], warns him that he will soon be killed by Indriði Þorvaldsson.

Háv 5 Having vowed to take vengeance for his son's killing, Hávarðr and his men are on their way to fight Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson when a flock of ravens flies past, something Hávarðr interprets as a sign of good luck for the journey and battle ahead.

Heið 5–6 Þorbjǫrn Brúnason, about to set out for the *Heiðarvíg* [Battle on the Heath], has an ominous vision of his wife serving him a meal of blood. He accuses her of wanting him dead.

Laxd 4 Þorgils Hǫlluson is warned of imminent danger at the hands of Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson by a huge woman who rides towards him as he approaches the assembly.

Laxd 5 A wet cloak hanging on a wall of his booth warns Þorgils in cryptic language of two killings to come, one of them being his own.

Nj 4 A sorcerer, Svanr, recites a couplet to bring about a fog.

Nj 29 One night Skarpheðinn Njálsson and Hǫgni Gunnarsson witness the dead Gunnarr in his burial mound speaking this stanza, which they interpret as his urging them to take vengeance for his killing.

Nj 40–1 Steinunn Refsdóttir addresses two stanzas to the missionary Þangbrandr alleging that the god Þórr caused his ship to break up in a storm and that the Christian God was powerless to stop it.

Nj 42 An anonymous stanza supposedly recited two weeks before the burning of Njáll and his family by a man riding a grey horse carrying a blazing firebrand and alluding to Flósi's plans.

Nj 44 A stanza supposedly recited by Skarpheðinn Njálsson, dead or alive, the day after the fire at Bergþórshváll. Its content is hard to understand but includes reference to a woman weeping and a man rejoicing in his sword-blade.

Nj 53–63 = Anon *Darraðarljóð*. A poem attributed to a man named Dǫrruðr in *Nj*, who sees women, identified circumstantially as valkyries, chanting and weaving a bloody web from men's entrails, which in the saga text implies a connection to the Battle of Clontarf, fought in Ireland in 1014 [see also section K].

Svarfd 7–9 Poetry spoken by the dead Klaufi Snækollsson who appears on the roof of the house of Karl inn rauði [the Red] and later outside it, holding his decapitated head.

Svarfd 13–15 The dead Klaufi and Karl (still alive) alternate stanzas predicting battle with Ljótólfr and his men in ominous weather.

Svarfd 16–17 Two stanzas spoken by the dead Klaufi riding a grey horse high above the clouds, as he appears to Karl [who understands this to presage his death in the battle that ensues with Ljótólfr and his company].

C. Dreams

BjH 30 Bjǫrn tells his sister of a foreboding dream he has had in which he is involved in a bloody battle.

BjH 34 Bjǫrn tells his wife of a foreboding dream of his death in which a woman invites him to her home [cf. *Gísl* 25–6].

Gísl 5 Gísli speaks to his brother Þorkell of two foreboding dreams he has had before Vésteinn's death.

Gísl 16–19, 20–2, 25–7, 29–31 Four sequences of dream stanzas on the subject of Gísli's impending death, spoken for the most part to his wife Auðr [according to the prose text] about dreams he has had presaging his death, which involve the appearance to him of a woman or women, in turn supportive or terrifying. Two further sequences (*Gísl* 32–4 and 35–8) are also dreams in which Gísli dreams he fights his enemies, led by Eyjólfr the Grey.

Glúm 2 Víga-Glúmr describes how he saw in a dream where a huge woman, wearing a helmet, walked towards Eyjafjörður and stood between the mountains. [In the prose text he interprets this to mean that his maternal grandfather Vigfúss had died in Norway and that his fetch was transferring herself to him.]

Glúm 5–6 Glúmr tells his son Már that he has had two dreams presaging battle. The first involves him and his enemy Þórarinn throwing whetstones at one another, while in the second he sees 'a great riding of divine beings' and valkyries pouring forth blood around men's bodies.

Gunnl 12 Shortly after having married Helga Þorsteinsdóttir, Hrafn Ǫnundarson has a bad dream in which he is cut down by a sword while in bed with her, and he perceives that she is pleased that she is unable to bind up his wound. [In the prose text she interprets this dream to mean that Gunnlaugr has returned to Iceland].

Gunnl 23–4 The fathers of Gunnlaugr and Hrafn each have a dream in which their sons appear to them covered in blood, speaking these two stanzas.

Heið 7–8 Shortly before battle, Þorbjǫrn Brúnason tells a farmhand a dream he has had in which his sword shatters in battle, but he nevertheless expresses the hope that it will serve him well.

Heið 9 Gísli Þorgautsson, the slayer of Barði Guðmundarson's brother, relates an ominous dream he has had in which a flock of wolves was attacking him.

Kumbl 1–2 A being with an axe appears in a dream to a man who has dared to remove a sword from the former's burial mound. In a stanza within the dream the *draugr* says he wants the sword back but is appeased and lets the human keep it when he responds with an appropriately aggressive stanza.

Nj 22 (Add 20) Gunnarr Hámundarson tells his brother Kolskeggr that he has had a disturbing dream in which 'the wild falcon eats marrow from the wolf' [the prose text states that the dream was of a pack of wolves attacking the brothers].

Nj 46 A man named Járngrímr [Iron-hooded] appears to Flosi Þórðarson in a dream and predicts battle, carnage and death for some men, presumably Flosi's.

StjǫrnODr An Icelandic astronomer and calendrical expert, Stjǫrnu-Oddi [Star-Oddi] Helgason has a dream in which a guest tells a story set in legendary Gautland. Oddi gradually takes on the identity of the protagonist, a poet named Dagfinnr, and participates in two adventures with a king, Geirviðr, the first against two

robbers in a forest (for which he composes the five-stanza *Geirviðarflokkr*), the second, of eleven stanzas, against a trollish shield maiden (*Geirviðardrápa*).

ÞSHDr 1–3 Three women warn Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson in three successive dreams of his impending death at the hands of his slave, Gilli, and urge him to kill the slave.

D. Male-Female Relations and Male-Male Relations Consequent upon Them

BjH 1 Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi Arngeirsson, recovering from wounds and in a tent with three other men, thinks that his beloved Oddný Eykyndill [Island-candle] would want to sleep with him there if she heard that he was close by.

BjH 2 Bjǫrn imagines how his rival Þórðr Kolbeinsson, now the husband of Oddný, is making love to her at their home, while he is plying the oars of a ship at sea.

BjH 3–12 A sequence of stanzas supposedly composed by Bjǫrn while he is on a visit to the home of Oddný and Þórðr, during which he expresses his desire for her and his hostility towards Þórðr.

BjH 4–5,14–15 Stanzas in which Þórðr denies Bjǫrn hospitality and Bjǫrn persists in ignoring Þórðr's wish that he should leave.

BjH 7–11 *Mannjafnaðr* [comparison of men] between Þórðr and Bjǫrn, who accuse each other of cowardice.

BjH 12 and 29 Bjǫrn speculates on whether he is the biological father of Oddný's son 'glíkan mér' [resembling me], 'iðglíki mér' [an exact likeness of me]; [cf. *Eb* 27–8 on the same topic].

BjH 13 Þórðr expresses regret to Oddný that the peace of their household has been broken by Bjǫrn's presence.

BjH 17 Bjǫrn praises Oddný's daughters as substitutes for her.

BjH 18–19 First Bjǫrn and then Þórðr tells of an incident in which his rival has been dishonoured or shamed, Þórðr having been scratched by a seal, Bjǫrn allegedly playing midwife to a cow.

BjH 20 A *níðvísa* (incomplete), said to have been spoken by Bjǫrn, that alludes to a wooden image of two men one behind the other.

BjH 26–8 *Grámagaflím* [Grey-belly Libel], an anonymous libel poem, supposedly composed by Bjǫrn, alleging Þórðr's conception when his mother ate a slimy fish.

BjH 31–2 Exchanges of insults between Þórðr and Bjǫrn.

BjH 39 Þórðr laments the effect of Bjǫrn's death on Oddný, whom he has to comfort by leading her around on a horse.

Eg 23–4 Egill Skalla-Grímsson speaks two stanzas to Arinbjǫrn Þórisson that conceal the identity of the object of his affection, his brother's widow, Ásgerðr, by means of the rhetorical device of *ofljóst* [excessively clear].

Eg 25–6 Egill defends Ásgerðr's reputation and financial interests [she is now his wife] against allegations that she is slave-born.

Eb 21–2 Two Swedish berserks, Halli and Leiknir, address the well-dressed daughter of Víga-Styrr, who is flirting with them.

Eb 24 Bjǫrn breiðvíkingakappi (Bbreiðv) in a lyrical stanza expresses the inevitability of parting from his lover, Þuríðr Barkardóttir.

Eb 27–8 Bbreiðv sees a boy running around whom he recognises as 'an exact likeness of me' and wonders whether he is his son; [cf. *BjH* 12 and 29].

Eb 29–31 About Bbreiðv's experience separated from his lover in a cold cave where he has sheltered from a magically-induced storm; [*Eb* 31 is also under section B].

Gísl 28 Gísli Súrsson asserts [against rumours to the contrary] that his wife Auðr is supportive and loyal to him.

Gr 13–16 Grettir Ásmundarson's first passage to Norway and his shipboard adventures involving a desirable woman.

Gr 64–5 [A servant woman sees the sleeping Grettir naked and remarks on how small his penis is]; in one stanza he denies this and then speaks a second indicating that he has raped her and thus shown how wrong she was about his virility.

Gunnl 10–11 In Norway, Gunnlaugr confesses to Hallfreðr vandrœðaskáld [Troublesome poet] that he has heard rumours that a rival, Hrafn Ǫnundarson, is making a bid for the hand of Helga Þorsteinsdóttir, his promised bride, and worries that he might not be considered as bold as Hrafn. He says it is not right for Hrafn to act in this way, when he himself has a prior claim on Helga.

Gunnl 13–14 Gunnlaugr meets Helga at a wedding feast and tells her how he feels about her marriage to another man, regretting that her parents produced such a beautiful daughter who could not be his.

Gunnl 15 Hrafn tells Gunnlaugr they should not quarrel over Helga, as there are many other women available to him.

Gunnl 16 Gunnlaugr admits he is in a weaker position than he would like in claiming Helga (who, he asserts, was married to Hrafn for money), because he was delayed on King Aðalráðr's business and thus prevented from returning to Iceland when he had promised.

Gunnl 19 Gunnlaugr sees Helga from afar amid a crowd of women and states that she was born to bring strife to men, admitting also that he was the cause of that because he was madly eager (*óðgjarn*) to possess her.

Gunnl 25 Þorkell í Hraundal, Helga's second husband, speaks this stanza as he holds the dead Helga in his arms after she has gazed for a long time at Gunnlaugr's cloak (which he had given her long ago).

Hallfr 1 Light-hearted anonymous stanza celebrating the attractiveness of Ingólfr Þorsteinsson to all the women, young and old, in Vatnsdalur [also in *Vatn*].

Hallfr 2–3 Hallfreðr composes insulting poetry about Már Jǫrundarson, a friend of Gríss Sæmingsson who has proposed marriage to Kolfinna Ávaldsdóttir, who is already the subject of Hallfreðr's attentions. He says he dreads being overlooked.

Hallfr 4 Hallfreðr reveals his continuing desire for Kolfinna ('I now love [her] almost better than if she were promised to me') on the eve of leaving Iceland, under pressure from family, for Norway.

Hallfr 16–17 Hallfreðr tells Ingibjǫrg, widow of Auðgísl, to whom he is now married, how he killed the man who attacked them both and avenged her husband's death as well as his own assault.

Hallfr 18–21 A series of stanzas that Hallfreðr, back in Iceland, recites to Kolfinna when they are together at some shieling huts, claiming he had heard they were her own compositions. In a series of distasteful images, he imagines her in bed with her sexually inadequate husband Gríss. These may be the *Grissvísur*, mentioned in the saga.

Hallfr 22–4 Hallfreðr admits his risk-taking behaviour caused by his excessive desire (*ofrækð*) for Kolfinna but then seems to renounce responsibility for it.

Hallfr 25 Gríss expresses concern for the weeping Kolfinna, who has been upset by Hallfreðr's behaviour and insulting poetry, calling it *fjandliga slaug* [a hostile act of wantonness].

Hallfr 28 Hallfreðr describes how he sees Kolfinna moving among a group of women like a richly-decorated vessel with gilded tackle.

Hallfr 33 Near to death on board ship, Hallfreðr imagines Kolfinna wiping her white hand over her soft brow if he dies and is buried at sea. He admits he previously gave her cause for sorrow.

Harð 1 Torfi Valbrandsson complains that he has just discovered that his father has betrothed his sister Signý to an older man, Grímkell Bjarnarson, and predicts a bad outcome of the marriage, which he opposes.

Harð 2–3 Signý Valbrandsdóttir predicts that her three-year-old son Hǫrðr will suffer greater and greater misfortune in his life, after he takes his first steps and knocks her precious necklace flying. Her husband Grímkell upbraids her as a bad mother for showing anger to her small son.

Harð 4 Grímkell expresses anger towards Torfi for giving his dead sister's baby to a vagrant who has visited his farm, thereby putting pressure on Grímkell, who vows to repay him for that suffering [see also *Harð* 7].

Harð 7 Hǫrðr remembers the disgrace he and his baby sister Þorbjǫrg suffered when she was carried around the countryside with vagrants, when it is suggested to him that he should take Helgi, the son of the vagrant Sigmundr, with him on a voyage to Norway.

Harð 13 Hǫrðr is displeased at his brother-in-law Indriði's failure to support him in a lawsuit, complaining of his harshness and predicting that he would be worse later.

Korm 1–10: Stanzas in which Kormákr describes the immediate attraction of his first sight of Steingerðr and her reciprocating gaze [staged as a dialogue between the lovers and their servants]. Kormákr also has premonitions that their relationship will be disastrous.

Korm 11–14 Verbal slander of Kormákr from Narfi, a supporter of Steingerðr's father, Þorkell, and Kormákr's retaliation with contemptuous libel of Narfi.

Korm 15 On a visit to his beloved Steingerðr, Kormákr refers to a trap set for him by two sons of a local sorceress and threatens retaliation if he is injured by it.

Korm 16 Kormákr complains that he cannot find his beloved in the house [her father has locked her up in a storeroom].

Korm 17–19 These three stanzas express Kormákr's defiance of his enemies, who are trying to prevent his access to Steingerðr, along with his undying love for her.

Korm 20–1 First Kormákr and then Steingerðr affirm their love for one another, each in a *helmingr*. He asks whether she would marry him and she says she would 'though he were blind'.

Korm 22–6 Five stanzas spoken by Kormákr expressing his reactions to Hólmgǫngu [Dueling]-Bersi's rushed marriage to Steingerðr [after the sorceress Þórveig had caused Kormákr to forget to attend his own wedding]: anger, regret, a sense of loss and doubt about Steingerðr's loyalty to him.

Korm 33 Kormákr tells of a missed meeting with Steingerðr, in which she failed to turn up to their rendezvous. [There is no correspondence here with anything in the prose text.]

Korm 51–2 Kormákr addresses these stanzas to Steingerðr upon hearing of her second marriage to Þorvaldr tinteinn [Tin-rod] Eysteinsson, whom he slanders as a weakling (*blotamaðr*) who works tin. He then threatens to slander other members of Tinteinn's family.

Korm 53–5 Three stanzas that Kormákr addresses to his brother, Þorgils skarði [Hare lip] about their adventures abroad, in each case contrasting them with Steingerðr's life back in Iceland, where she has to put up with *goðleiðum gáða* [a wretch loathed by the gods].

Korm 56–8 Further on similar lines to *Korm* 53–5, Kormákr contrasts his life at sea, though preparing to return to Iceland, with Tinteinn's life in the farmyard and in bed with Steingerðr.

Korm 59–63 [According to the prose saga, Kormákr runs into Steingerðr shortly after he has landed back in Iceland, and the two of them spend five nights at a farm in a bed separated by a partition.] In stanza 59 Kormákr complains about this physical separation but expresses the hope that one day they will be able to consummate their love. In stanza 60 he gives more detail of how he lay in bed frustrated. Stanza 61 acknowledges Steingerðr's supreme beauty, while stanza 62 speaks of Kormákr's vision of being able to hold Steingerðr in his arms. Stanza 63 is obscure but seems to refer to a gift Kormákr intended to give Steingerðr, which she spurned.

Korm 64–5 Tinteinn's relatives commission a *níð* stanza defaming Steingerðr and Kormákr [figured as horses mating] which they attribute to Kormákr, who then vows to retaliate. [He kills Narfi and threatens to kill Tinteinn's brother].

Korm 76–7 Kormákr, about to leave Iceland for a second time, complains about the amount of compensation he has to pay to Steingerðr's husband for giving her two lingering kisses, and then vows to send her a stanza.

Korm 80 Kormákr and his brother rescue Steingerðr from a band of vikings, and swim back to shore with her.

Korm 81 Kormákr tells Steingerðr to stay with her husband rather than accompany him on his adventures. The stanza is finely modulated to convey a range of emotions: resignation at having finally given up the possibility of possessing Steingerðr, contempt for her husband, and an indication that Kormákr's own life and achievements are far beyond the understanding of Steingerðr, yet she is nevertheless made famous by his poetry.

Laxd 2 A woman (Auðr) bitterly acknowledges her abandonment by her husband in favour of another woman [cf. *Nj* 12].

Nj 1–3 (Add 1–3) Unnr, wife of Hrútr Herjólfsson, tells her father about her husband's inability to consummate their marriage, which she attributes to the effect of sorcery, and says she wants a divorce.

Nj 5–11 (Add 4–10) Stanzas attributed to Gunnarr Hámundarson covering the prose text of *Nj* chs 22–30 concerning the recovery of Unnr's dowry [see also section E].

Nj 12 Þórhildr skáldkona [Poetess] recites a ditty castigating her husband Þráinn Sigfússon for lecherous ogling of a young girl, whom he later marries.

Nj 15–17 (Add 13–15) Stirred up by tension between the female members of the households of Gunnarr and Njáll, Gunnarr's relative Sigmundr composes malicious poetry about Njáll and his sons.

Nj 26 (Add 24) Gunnarr expresses his feelings about his wife Hallgerðr's refusal to give him a lock of her hair to restring his bow: dishonour and mean-mindedness.

Nj 32 (Add 27) Skarpheðinn insults Hallgerðr, calling her a hag and a whore, after finding her at Þráinn Sigfússon's house, where he had gone in search of compensation.

S*varfd* 1–3 Klaufi Snækollsson recites *Svarfd* 1–2, apparently to himself, on discovering a woman, Yngvildr, he wants to seduce, in company with another man, Hrólfr nefglita [Shiny-nose], at the house of her lover, Ljótólfr. He threatens to kill Nefglita. Karl inn rauði [the Red] speaks a stanza about the same incident, blaming Ljótólfr for refusing to come outside and fight.

Svarfd 4 Klaufi looks forward to claiming Yngvildr as his wife after he and Karl had tricked her father into giving consent for their marriage.

Vígl 1 Just when her marriage contract with a man she does not want to marry is to be ratified, Ól̨of geisli [Lightbeam] speaks this stanza affirming her love for the man she has secretly promised to marry, Þorgrímr prúði [the Splendid].

Vígl 2 Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir hears that her beloved Víglundr and his brother Trausti have been driven out to sea by a storm while out fishing and believes they have been drowned. She speaks a stanza expressing her grief at the sight of the waves which make her think of the supposedly drowned men.

Vígl 3 Víglundr Þorgrímsson speaks this stanza to Ketilríðr after having realised that plotting by people opposed to their relationship is forcing them apart and promises her his undying love, urging her to remember their vows.

Vígl 4–5 Víglundr is upset by Ketilríðr's forced betrothal to another man and claims in a stanza that she has broken their pledge to one another, which she denies [in the prose]. He says he must fight his rival, Hákon, and so avoid jealous thoughts of another man holding Ketilríðr in his embrace.

Vígl 6–7 Víglundr speaks two stanzas upon parting from Ketilríðr before going into exile [as a consequence of having killed her betrothed, Hákon]. He urges her to use his stanzas and the sight of the sea to remind herself of him. In *Vígl* 7 he recalls her tearful parting from him.

Vígl 8 Ketilríðr speaks a stanza [only in AM 510 4to] affirming that she would have followed Víglundr anywhere, if the sea could become land and if the frightening sea could turn into a green plain.

Vígl 9 Víglundr speaks a stanza upon being urged to have his hair washed, saying that he has never had it washed since he parted from Ketilríðr and will not let any other woman wash it for him.

Vígl 10–12 Three stanzas spoken by Víglundr, remembering Ketilríðr, upon approaching the coast of Iceland and seeing Snæfellsjökull.

Vígl 13 Ketilríðr speaks this stanza upon recognising Víglundr on his return to Iceland and reflects on her own [apparent] situation of having been married off to an older man.

Vígl 14–16 Víglundr expresses his shock at having seen and clearly recognised Ketilríðr without her veil and threatens to cut off the head of her [supposed] husband. In *Vígl* 15–16 his brother Trausti advises him very strongly to desist from killing the man and to behave with restraint.

Vígl 17 Víglundr tells Ketilríðr's supposed husband how unhappy he is that she is not his own wife.

Vígl 18–19 A cryptic exchange between Ketilríðr and her supposed husband Þórðr.

Vígl 20 Víglundr encounters Ketilríðr outdoors and compares her husband to an old ferryboat floating among skerries but herself to a beautiful warship gliding over the sea [only in AM 510 4to; cf. *Hallfr* 28].

Vígl 21–2 Víglundr warns Ketilríðr's husband Þórðr to keep a good eye on his wife in case she should be drawn to have an illicit relationship with him.

Vígl 23–4 Víglundr refers to his likely future voyaging lifestyle [to keep him away from sexual temptation?] but admits that he loves another man's wife. In *Vígl* 24 he tells Ketilríðr that he does not like to see her in the arms of a dotard, when it should be he who embraces her.

Þórð 1 Þórðr hreða [the Quarrelsome] tells how he and his brothers attacked and killed the Norwegian king Sigurðr slefa [Saliva] because he had seduced the wife of one of the brothers. This brother, Klyppr, dies in the fight, in which four men are killed.

Þórð 3–4 Þórðr tells a farmer how he surprised Ormr, [relative of Miðfjarðar-Skeggi and brother of his sister's fiancé, Ásbjǫrn], while he was attempting to seduce her and killed him because he (Ormr) wanted to disgrace her. He then admits that Skeggi will want to attack him thereafter.

Þórð 12 Ásbjǫrn responds to a question from Skeggi, [his maternal uncle], of why he did not run from Þórðr and his company when they attacked and wounded him. Ásbjǫrn says that it is because he remembers a woman [presumably Þórðr's sister Sigríðr to whom he was once betrothed].

E. Killings, Battles and Duels

[Many stanzas in this section are recited in response to a question from an interlocutor who has not been present at the event.]

[Exchanges of insults between men that do not also involve fights are listed in section D.]

Band 6 Óspakr Glúmsson records how he killed Már, second husband of his former wife Svala, because he could not bear the idea of Már enjoying Svala's embraces [cf. *Gunnl* ch. 12].

BjH 25 Bjǫrn clarifies that he used no weapon upon an opponent but rather strangled him.

BjH 35–8 Stanzas from Bjǫrn and Þórðr on Bjǫrn's last stand and Þórðr's victory [raven motif of *BjH* 38, cf. *Gunnl* 24/6]

Dpl 1 Helgi Ásbjarnarson expresses fear of being attacked by a revenge party at night in a forested location.

Dpl 2 Grímr Droplaugarsonr finds the killing of his brother 'difficult to tolerate' (*líil hlít vas at því*) and expresses relief at the killing of Helgi Ásbjarnarson.

Dpl 3 Grímr expresses satisfaction at having avenged a killing; *hug minn hlœgir við þat* [my mind rejoices at that].

Dpl 4–5 Grímr recalls an earlier fight in which his brother Helgi fought bravely but was killed.

Dpl 6 Grímr tells how he had to lie low for four days and nights before announcing the killing [of Helgi Ásbjarnarson].

Eg 2 Skallagrímr expresses satisfaction at having avenged his brother's death by killing the latter's attackers.

Eg 8–10 Egill's killing of Bárðr, King Eiríkr blóðøx's steward.

Eg 11 Egill's up-beat report on how he despatched three of the king's men to Hel.

Eg 12 Egill encourages his companions to mount an attack on Lund.

Eg 16–20 Egill and his brother Þórólfr fight as mercenaries for the English king Aðalsteinn.

Eg 27 Egill's report of his killing of Ketill hǫðr.

Eg 30 Egill's report of his killing of Berg-Ǫnundr.

Eg 31 Egill's nonchalant killing ('we fought, and I did not care about feuds') of King Eiríkr's young son Rǫgnvaldr and his companions.

Eg 59–63 Egill's single combat with the berserk Ljótr the Pale.

Eg 64 Egill's fight with Atli the Short, whom he killed by biting through his windpipe after Atli had used sorcery to blunt his sword [see also under section B].

Eg 66–71 Egill's adventure in Värmland and his attack on Ármóðr and various other hostile men there.

Eg 99–105 (*Arkv* 3–9) Egill expresses relief at having escaped from death at the hands of Eiríkr blóðøx.

Eg 122 Egill recalls (to Einarr skálaglam [Tinkle-scales]) a tough call in which he opposed numerous men in a fight and killed them all.

Eb 3–19, Þmáhl *Máv* 1–17 These staged stanzas express their speaker's complex of thoughts and emotions, some unusual, because he is a peace-loving man caught up in a local feud, at the situation he finds himself in; he speaks partly in self-defence against potential accusations of cowardice and effeminacy; he defends his peaceable stance; he expresses wariness and concern for the outcome of the legal case that will almost certainly be brought against him by Snorri *goði*, and he seeks support from powerful kinsmen and neighbours.

Eb 23 Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson tells how he made short work of the two Swedish berserks who were causing him trouble.

Fbr 2 Þormóðr Bersason begins his *erfidrápa* for his foster-brother Þorgeirr Hávarsson, by telling how Þorgeirr took vengeance at the age of fifteen on his father's killer: 'hann varð hvettr at vinna happ' [he was keen to carry out a lucky deed] [see also section K].

Fbr 3 Goaded by a woman whose hospitality they have accepted, Þormóðr and Þorgeirr kill two local troublemakers.

Fbr 10 Þorgeirr ('hinn, es rœkir heiptir manna' [he who sees to people's feuds]) makes a hole in the roof of a building to get to an enemy who has attacked him and kills three men.

Fbr 18 In the final stanza of *Þorgdr*, Þormóðr recounts that Þorgeirr killed thirteen men over the course of his life.

Fbr 23–4 In Greenland Þormóðr tells his companions how he killed Þorgrímr trolli, who killed Þorgeirr, in spite of his physical disability and recognises that fate has saved him from death.

Fbr 26 Þormóðr's self-assessment of the way he carried out vengeance for Þorgeirr: 'matkak hefnð við marga … hefk gǫrt fyr svartan mik' [I was not competing in vengeance with many … I, the black-haired one, have done my part].

Fbr 28–30 Þormóðr, having returned to Norway from Greenland, gives King Óláfr a corrected account of how he took vengeance for Þorgeirr's killing there, in the face of the spurious claims of others.

Gísl 1–2 Personification of weapons as agents of warfare.

Gísl 8–9 Gísli and Þorgrímr *goði* face off at a ball game, and Þorgrímr speaks a couplet tantamount to admitting culpability for the killing of Vésteinn, which Gísli understands.

Gísl 11 Gísli tacitly admits his culpability for the killing of Þorgrímr in a cryptic stanza 'er æva skyldi' [which never should have been [recited]]'. His sister Þórdís hears it and comes to understand it.

Gísl 12 Gísli compares his sister unfavourably to the legendary Guðrún Gjúkadóttir and accuses her of not placing loyalty to kin above all else, given that she has revealed how to interpret *Gísl* 11 to her new husband Bǫrkr, thereby outing Gísli as the killer of Þorgrímr.

Glúm 1 Víga [Killer]-Glúmr tells his mother, Ástríðr, how depressed he feels that, while he was in Norway, his neighbours shifted the boundary between their estate and his; 'verðr fǫðurarfi mínum harðla hróðrskotat' [the reputation of my inheritance has been severely beaten aside]. He threatens not to be 'starflauss' [without work] in this regard.

Glum 3 A cryptic *helmingr* in which Glúmr mentions the protection offered by woodland south of a river. [This seems to refer to his escape from an ambush apparently set by his adversary Víga-Skúta. The *helmingr* is also in *Reykd*.]

Glúm 4 Glúmr tells his son Már that his sleep has been disturbed and that he is gearing up for more killings.

Glúm 7 An incomplete and cryptic stanza addressed to an unspecified woman, seeming to imply that one of Glúmr's unacknowledged killings [of Þorvaldr krókr [Hook], which he has allowed to be attributed to a young boy], is no longer the subject of much conversation.

Glúm 8 Glúmr laments the loss of his estate at Þverá, forfeit because of his killing of Þorvaldr krókr, recalling how he cleared the land 'sem jarlar forðum' [like jarls long ago].

Glúm 10–12 Brúsi Hallason recites a stanza alluding to an ambush at the Hegranes assembly, in which Glúmr fled from his enemies by rolling down a gravel bank between the assembly field and the shore [implicitly out of fear]. Einarr þveræingr [from Þverá] then addresses the same topic with a more obviously satirical focus. In *Glúm* 12 Glúmr presents his side of the story in a stanza that claims that he and his supporters were really spoiling for a fight but they did not want to risk the descent from the gravel bank.

Gr 3 Ǫnundr gets back at the vikings who have attacked him, mocking them and standing over one as he bleeds to death.

Gr 6 An ignominious botched attempt at a killing by a farmhand is contrasted in an anonymous stanza with the way men of glory performed killings in the past.

Gr 7 An anonymous stanza about how groups of men fought each other with whale bones and lumps of whale meat, sparked by quarrels over driftage rights.

Gr 11 Grettir describes his killing of the farmhand Skeggi with an axe, using *double entendre* to avoid censure.

Gr 19 Grettir boasts to a woman that he has killed twelve berserks and saved her from their unwanted attentions.

Gr 20–1 Grettir's feud with a man named Bjǫrn and his killing of a bear.

Gr 27, 57, 58 Occasions on which Grettir withdraws from a fight after it is clear that his opponents have superior numbers [*Gr* 57–8 also in *Ldn*].

Gr 28 Grettir tells how he attacks and decapitates a man who has insulted him.

Gr 29 Grettir kills the berserk Snækollr and splits his jawbones in two.

Gr 38 Grettir tells how he killed his brother Atli's slayer, Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin [Oxen's Strength], and fittingly repaid that life-robbery.

Gr 47 Grettir expresses his gratitude to Hallmundr for helping him escape from a fight with Þórir Skeggjason's men on Arnarvatnsheiðr.

Gr 49 Grettir boasts to a woman of killing numerous local farmers who have attacked him.

Gr 66–70 At his last stand on Drangey Grettir retrospectively reviews a number of his killings, some not mentioned in the prose saga. [For *Gr* 70, see also section B].

Gr 71–2 Grettir's killer, Þorbjǫrn ǫngull [Fish-hook], taunts Grettir's mother Ásdís with his killing and shows her his decapitated head. She replies with an accusation of cowardice and says Grettir was only able to be killed because he was already ill and Þorbjǫrn had used sorcery to kill him.

Gr 73 In Byzantium, Grettir's half-brother, Þorsteinn drómundr [Warship], addressing his mistress Spés, praises his brother's courageous last stand.

Gunnl 1 Gunnlaugr offers a farmer a mark in compensation for his knocking out the farmer's shepherd, who had ridden his horse without permission.

Gunnl 17–18 Gunnlaugr and Hrafn exchange verses before fighting a duel. The latter (*Gunnl* 18) thinks of how Helga will receive the news.

Gunnl 22 Gunnlaugr speaks this stanza about his last fight with Hrafn and mentions Hrafn's bravery after the latter gives him a fatal head-wound. [The prose text stresses Hrafn's treachery in delivering the blow].

Hallfr 15 Hallfreðr and a companion (Auðgísl) are treacherously attacked by a man they meet on a journey in Sweden but Hallfreðr manages to kill him.

Hallfr 26 Gríss's friend Már ambushes Hallfreðr and tries to kill him.

Hallfr 27 Hallfreðr anticipates a duel with Gríss and that it will vindicate his feelings for Kolfinna.

Harð 15 Hǫrðr anticipates strong resistance will be offered by his men to the over-confident Torfi if Torfi tries to attack them at the farm Botn, where the outlaws have taken refuge.

Harð 16 Hǫrðr describes how his brother-in-law Illugi and his men had previously killed fifteen men and were reluctant to make peace. In a second attack another fifteen from their side were killed.

Harð 17 Hǫrðr expresses his deep suspicions of Kjartan Kǫtluson's offer of safe-conduct for the Hólmverjar from the island where they are holed up.

Háv 1 Óláfr bjarnylr [Bear-warmth] Hávarðarson complains of his silent, unfriendly reception by the household of his father's enemy Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson.

Háv 6 Hávarðr confirms to his men that he has killed his son's slayer by cleaving his head to the molars.

Háv 7 Hávarðr confirms the number of men who fell on the enemy side and that one of his own men had been killed with a launching roller.

Háv 8 Hávarðr reports that he and another man had sought out and killed the brother of his son's slayer.

Háv 9 Hávarðr pronounces himself justified in killing members of the family of his son's slayer and says he does not in any way regret the course he has taken. He admits they are very likely to seek revenge on him.

Háv 10 Hávarðr and his men seek protection from Steinþórr of Eyrr, who offers them hospitality and support in their defence at law. Hávarðr laments the loss of reputation of the people of Ísafjörður as a consequence of this feud.

Háv 11 Hávarðr reflects on how his opponents laughed at him but predicts that the tables will soon be turned.

Háv 12 Hávarðr says he will not offer compensation for the killings that he has carried out and will expect 'the evildoer at home'.

Háv 13 Hávarðr [probably] addresses two boys who have fallen foul of yet another relative of Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson and offers for them to join his band. The meaning of the second *helmingr* is unclear.

Háv 14 The stanza is obscure but seems to acknowledge the swiftness of Hávarðr's relatives in helping him take vengeance on his son's killer, once he had decided to take action.

Háv 15 Hávarðr reflects on the success of his revenge for his son, aided by his relatives, news of which will come to Ísafjörður.

Heið 1–2 Two stanzas attributed to Gestr Þórhallsson with graphic details of his killing of Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson.

Heið 3 Þuríðr Óláfsdóttir urges her son Barði Guðmundarson to take vengeance for the killing of his brother Hallr.

Heið 13–14 Tindr Hallkelsson tells how many men fell in the Battle on the Heath, having been asked the question in the prose text by his brother Illugi.

Korm 27–32 Seven stanzas recited by Bersi (27, 28) and Kormákr (29–32) about their first duel, which Bersi won on a technicality. Bersi, as an experienced dueller, boasts of his success and rubs in Kormákr's inferior performance; Kormákr blames his sword for letting him down in stanzas addressed to the sword's owner, Skeggi, (29), and his mother Dalla (30–2).

Korm 34–5 Two obscure stanzas Kormákr apparently addresses to Skeggi, again blaming his sword for his poor performance at the duel with Bersi.

Korm 36–45 The following ten stanzas concern the hostility between Steinarr Qnundarson, acting on behalf of Kormákr, his sister's son, and Bersi, during which Steinarr exacts revenge for the latter's previous defeat of Kormákr in a duel and inflicts a shaming wound (*klámhǫgg*) on him, as a consequence of which Steingerðr divorces herself from Bersi. Another theme here is the broken friendship of Bersi and Þórðr Arndísarson on account of Bersi's refusal to pay compensation for injuries his son had inflicted on Þórðr's two boys. A further cause of Bersi's resort to duelling is his refusal to return Steingerðr's dowry and bride-price, when her brother Þorkell requests it. All the stanzas are attributed to Bersi (*Korm* 36, 37, 39, 40, 41 and 43) or Steinarr (*Korm* 38 and 42). Bersi presents himself (36–7) as an experienced dueller spoiling for a fight, but Steinarr (38) indicates that Bersi is really somewhat of a coward because he wears a protective magical stone (*lyfsteinn*). Bersi (39–41), [after having been seriously wounded], embarks on a lamentation several stanzas long about how his career is finished, and friends and kinsmen have abandoned him, but he still manages (44) to kill Þorkell 'I can [still] show my teeth'. [Some of the Bersi material in *Korm* may have originally belonged to a separate narrative.]

Korm 46–50 Stanzas about Hólmgǫngu-Bersi's various feuds and killings.

Korm 66–7 Þorvarðr, brother of Tinteinn, issues a challenge to Kormákr to fight him in a duel, but does not turn up on time to the appointed place. Kormákr accuses him of being a coward. The subject of stanza 67 is obscure.

Korm 68–75 Both Kormákr and Þorvarðr (who gives more) offer money to a *spákona*, Þórdís, to influence the outcome of their duel through sacrifice. At a point in the proceedings, Steingerðr turns up to watch, and Kormákr addresses st. 70 to her. In some stanzas (e.g. 72) he bemoans the hardships he has suffered on her account. Stanza 74 deals with the unexpected incursion of the *spákona*'s husband onto the duelling ground.

Korm 78–9 [These two stanzas supposedly relate to an expedition to Bjarmaland. Both are very tenuously connected to the prose narrative and are hard to understand outside that context.] In the first Kormákr relates a tussle between himself in one ship and Tinteinn and Steingerðr in another in which she rams his ship; the second is a bizarre account [apparently] of how a young man stole Kormákr's cloak pin.

Korm 82–5 [These, the last stanzas of *Korm*, are supposed to be Kormákr's last words as he lies wounded with severely crushed ribs after a wrestling match with a huge Scottish giant.] Stanzas 82, 83 and 85 present the speaker as being preoccupied with the manner of his death and whether he would be taken into the world of Valhǫll, while stanza 84 appears to deal with a completely different incident in Ireland.

Krók 1 Króka-Refr tells his mother how he has used a halberd to kill a neighbour who has insulted him by offering meagre compensation for his slaying of Refr's mother's shepherd.

Krók 2 Refr kills an insolent man who has insulted him and with whom he had previously wrestled.

Krók 3 Refr speaks this stanza from a stronghold in Greenland which has been besieged by his enemies, shortly before a trick he warns them of comes to pass, and he escapes from the now burning stronghold in a ship on wheels which takes him out to sea.

Laxd 3 Þorgils Hǫlluson reports to Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir that he and his party have killed Helgi Harðbeinsson, slayer of her husband Bolli Þorleiksson, and declares him avenged. He names the number of men killed as three.

Nj 13–14 (Add 11–12) Skarpheðinn Njálsson reacts to news that his foster-father has killed an enemy and expresses his frustration that he and his brothers were not involved in retribution for the ensuing death of their foster-father.

Nj 18–19 (Add 16–17) Skarpheðinn pretends to his father he is looking for sheep but indicates that he is out to kill Sigmundr. He gives his decapitated head to a shepherd to take home to Hallgerðr.

Nj 20 (Add 18) Gunnarr directs a threatening stanza to one Skamkell, who has tried to attack him from behind, before killing him.

Nj 21 (Add 19) Skarpheðinn says he is bored by scrapping at a horse-fight and is eager to get on with fighting with weapons.

Nj 23–25 (Add 21–23) Incidents leading up to Gunnarr's last stand.

Nj 30 (Add 26) In quest of vengeance Skarpheðinn threatens to kill Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, who offers compensation, and urges him to offer self-judgement to Hǫgni Gunnarsson.

Nj 33–4 (Add 28–9) Skarpheðinn relates how he attacked and killed Þráinn Sigfússon with his axe Rimmugýgr and encourages others to avenge the rough treatment they suffered from Hákon jarl.

Nj 35 (Add 30) Skarpheðinn urges his brothers not to blame their father, Njáll, for accepting compensation for the death of his illegitimate son Hǫskuldr, even though the killer, Lýtingr, is still at large.

Nj 43 A stanza attributed to Móðólfr Ketilsson commemorating the burning of Njáll and his family by the sons of Sigfúss, noting that one man (Kári Sǫlmundarson) escaped alive and that the killing of Hǫskuldr is now repaid.

Nj 47–50 Stanzas spoken by Kári Sǫlmundarson in defence of his own behaviour in escaping from the burning and satire directed at Skapti Þóroddsson (*Nj* 48–9) after he had been speared while trying to separate opposing parties at the Alþingi.

Nj 51 A satirical *helmingr* attributed to Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson criticising the poor behaviour and lack of appetite for fighting shown by four individuals supporting the burners' party.

Nj 52 In Orkney Kári overhears Gunnarr Lambason giving a false account of the burning and utters a justification of the proper retaliation he and his supporters had carried out. [The prose text claims he then decapitated Gunnarr].

Svarfd 5 Þorleifr jarlsskáld [Jarl's poet] Rauðfeldarson asserts that Klaufi Bǫggvir [Evildoer] slashed his bag of moss and his brother's cloak and must be killed [The brothers were gathering moss for their mother. The stanza is also in *Ldn*, which says they were on Klaufi's land.]

Svarfd 6 Þorleifr describes how he punished Klaufi and killed him with a sword.

Svarfd 10–12 Three difficult stanzas whose order may be misplaced. In the first two Þorleifr appears to be characterising his life on the run after killing Klaufi, while *Svarfd* 12 is Karl's apparent offer of help to Þorleifr if he waits.

Þórð 2 Þórðr tells his sister Sigríðr of a fight in which he killed two men. [The fight was over a cloak which he wanted to buy for her.]

Þórð 5 Þórðr says he will not flee from a ridge before a posse of six men headed by Ormr's sworn brother Indriði, but rather fight as long as possible.

Þórð 6 Þórðr tells a farmer [Þórhallr] how he killed four of Indriði's men but spared Indriði's own life.

Þórð 7 Þórðr tells [the farmer's wife, Ólǫf], that fifteen men fell and seven were wounded in an encounter with another of Ormr's relatives, Qzurr. Þórðr says he himself killed six and wounded the cowardly Qzurr.

Þórð 8 Þórðr, [on his way from buying building timber], is ambushed again by Qzurr with eleven men. He tells a man [Þorgrímr] that he killed six and sent them 'til ítrar hallar Óðins' [to the splendid hall of Óðinn].

Þórð 9 Þórðr announces the killing of seven men, Qzurr and six others, [to the people of Miklabær].

Þórð 10–11 Skeggi, [whose relatives Qzurr and Ormr have both been killed by Þórðr], arrives with a large band of men [at the farm Miklabær] and demands that Þórðr should come out and fight. Þórðr says he will agree to do so as long as he can be led to the place where he killed Qzurr. He further reminds Skeggi of the fact that he killed two of Skeggi's close relatives.

F. Outlawry

Eb 5 (*Máv* 3) Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr boasts that Snorri *goði* would not be able to outlaw him that winter.

Eb 19 (*Máv* 17) Þórarinn speaks defiantly about what will happen if men outlaw him.

Fbr 30 Þormóðr threatens harm to those in Greenland 'þeims mik sekðu' [who outlawed me].

Gísl 13–15 Gísli reacts to news of his outlawry which he claims (*Gísl* 15) is dishonourable.

Gísl 22 After saying he had told men of his dream, Gísli claims that those who outlawed him will have it worse if he is angered now.

Gísl 23 Gísli addresses a servant girl and assures her he has a plan of escape from his pursuers; nevertheless, he says he accepts whatever fate ordains without complaining.

Gísl 35–6 In a dream, Gísli imagines his death as an outlaw (*Gísl* 35/6 'emk nekkvat sekr við her' [I am somewhat outlawed among men]).

Gr 30 Upon his return to Iceland from Norway, Grettir, addressing an unnamed man, hears of the deaths of his father and brother as well as of his own outlawry. He admits, by way of an aphorism, that a warrior cannot help but be 'daprari' [rather sorrowful] at news such as this.

Harð 14 Hǫrðr lays the blame for the sentence of outlawry just imposed upon him on his mother's brother, Torfi, and claims he has no fear of this sentence.

G. Old Age

Band 4 Ófeigr Skíðason complains of the ills of old age and claims [ironically] he must have been suffering dementia himself when he selected Egill Skúlason as an arbitrator in his son's lawsuit.

Eg 1 Kveld-Úlfr expresses his regret and frustration that old age prevents him from taking vengeance for the death of his son Þórólfr.

Eg 80 (*Sonatorrek* 9) Egill claims he is too old to take vengeance for his son's death, blaming 'gengileysi gamals þegns' [the lack of support of an old man].

Eg 130–2 Three stanzas in which Egill Skalla-Grímsson describes his physical decay and his powerlessness to stop the women of the household bossing him around. He also (*Eg* 131) contrasts his present abject condition with past glories, in which princes rewarded him for his poetry.

Glúm 13 Víga-Glúmr laments that 'Illts of orðit á jǫrð' [Things have turned bad on earth] and that he is too old to avenge the death of his brother-in-law Grímr eyrarleggr [Bank-leg].

Korm 40–1, 48, 50 Various stanzas in which Hólmgǫngu-Bersi laments that his duelling career is at an end because of old age and the disloyalty of kinsmen.

Vígl 14–24 Stanzas in which disparaging remarks are made about Ketilríðr's doddery old husband Þórðr.

H. Death

Eg 17 Egill mourns the death of his noble brother Þórólfr in battle in England: 'helnauð es þat' [that is deadly sorrow] but enjoins stoicism: 'en vér verðum hylja harm' [but we must conceal grief] [see also section I].

Eg 72–96 (*Sonatorrek*) The poem is a lament for the death of Egill's family members, father, mother, sons, and the speaker's inability to take vengeance for the deaths for several reasons.

Eg 123 Egill reacts to the death of his friend Arinbjǫrn by questioning where he will now find generous patrons [such as Arinbjǫrn was] [see also section I].

Gísl 6 and 7 Gísli reports his wife's grief at her brother Vésteinn's murder in two elaborate stanzas that stress how much she weeps [see also section I].

Gísl 10 At the news of the death of Þorgrímr, Gísli recommends to a servant that they should keep silent.

Gísl 24 Gísli reacts strongly and defiantly to news of his brother Þorkell's death: 'vér drygjum dǫð til dauða' [we [I] shall perform deeds until death].

Gísl 40 Facing death, Gísli expresses satisfaction at his performance in fighting ('Vel hygg ek' [I feel good]) and imagines his wife, Auðr's, reaction to the death of her brave husband. His final words attribute credit for his bravery to his family line: 'faðir minn gaf sveini sínum þá herðu' [my father gave his son that toughness].

Hallfr 34 Hallfreðr claims he would die without sorrow if he knew his soul was saved [not in M version of saga]. He laments nothing but fears Hell.

I. Grief

Eg 72–3 (*Sonatorrek* 1–2) Grief weighs upon him and makes it almost impossible for Egill to compose poetry.

Eg 94–5 (*Sonatorrek* 23–4) Egill considers his poetic ability compensation for the loss of his sons.

Háv 2 Hávarðr laments that he has not slept since the death of his 'allsaklausan' [completely innocent] son Óláfr [see also section G].

Háv 3 Hávarðr says that old age has made it difficult to speak words of honour with ease since his son, 'snjallr aflstuðill' [the vigorous strength-support], had died [see also section G].

J. Generosity, Gift-giving and Friendship

Eg 4–5 The boy Egill praises his maternal grandfather, Yngvarr, for his gift of three sea-snail shells and a duck egg, and at the same time boasts of his own poetic abilities.

Eg 6 Skallagrímr reacts angrily to the gift of an axe he says is defective, sent to him by King Eiríkr blóðøx.

Eg 7 The young Egill rejoices in his mother's encouragement of his aggressive behaviour and looks forward to being bought a ship to start him off on his viking adventures.

Eg 19 After having been lavishly compensated with a gold ring by King Aðalsteinn for his brother's death, Egill describes how the king handed over the ring on the blade of a sword, and concedes that the king 'ræðr at meira lofi' [gains the greater praise] [see also section I].

Eg 20 Egill describes how the king's further generosity causes his eyebrows, which have drooped 'af harmi' [from grief], to be raised again [see also section I].

Eg 56–7 Egill speaks with relief about how he has received the gift of his own head after his encounter with King Eiríkr blóðøx in York [same theme in *Arkv* 3–9, *Eg* 99–105].

Eg 58 Still on the above subject, Egill recalls the friendship of Arinbjǫrn, who helped him in adversity.

Eg 65 Egill reflects upon Arinbjǫrn's generosity in giving him a splendid gown.

Eg 124–5 Einarr skálaglamm Helgason complains that he has not been properly rewarded for his poetry and will change patrons.

Eg 126 (*Skjaldardrápa*) The gift of an ornate shield from Einarr skálaglamm prompts Egill to compose a *drápa* [see section K].

Eg 128 (*Berudrápa*) The gift to Egill of another shield from Þorsteinn Þóruson prompts another *drápa* [see section K].

Hallfr 8 King Óláfr Tryggvason listens reluctantly to a *drápa* by Hallfreðr and then rewards him with a sword with no sheath [see further *Hallfr* 14].

Hallfr 14 The king orders Hallfreðr to compose a stanza in which a word for 'sword' occurs in every line.

Hallfr 29 Hallfreðr has a vision of King Óláfr, who tells him not to carry out his duel with Gríss. Instead he is forced to arbitration and to paying for the *Grissvísur* [Verses about Gríss] with a gold ring.

Harð 5 Hǫrðr Grímkelsson rejects the gift of a shield offered him by Illugi Hrólfsson, who has just married Hǫrðr's half-sister Þuríðr.

Nj 37–8 Þorvaldr veili [the Miserable] says he will send a mail-coat to the poet Úlfr Uggason, urging him to drive the missionary Þangbrandr out of Iceland. Úlfr replies in a stanza in which he says he will not accept this bait and that it is out of character for him 'at gína flugu' [to gape for a fly].

K. Formal Poetry

[Includes *drápur*, *flokkar*, *erfidrápur* and *ævikviður*. These poems are not described in detail, as is the case with *lausavísur*, but are listed as they occur

within individual sagas of Icelanders. Formal poems mentioned in sagas of Icelanders but not actually cited there are not listed here.]

Bergb [see section B]

Eg 21–2 *Aðalsteinsdrápa* [praise]

Eg 34–54 *Hǫfuðlausn* [(mock) praise]

Eg 72–96 *Sonatorrek* [cf. *erfidrápa*]

Eg 97–121 *Arinbjarnarkviða* [praise mixed with personal reminiscence]

Eg 126 *Skjaldardrápa* [praise]

Eg 128 *Berudrápa* [praise]

Eb 1–2 Oddr breiðfirðingr, *Illugadrápa* [praise]

Eb 20, 26, 33–5 Þormóðr Trefilsson, *Hrafnsmál* [praise or *erfidrápa*]

Fbr 2–7, 10–18 Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason, *Þorgeirsdrápa* [*erfidrápa*]

Gr 22–4 Grettir, *Ævikviða I*

Gr 39–42 Grettir, *Ævikviða II*

Gr 46–7 *Hallmundarflokkr* [praise]

Gr 50–56 *Hallmundarkviða* [*ævikviða*]

Gr 66–70 *ævikviða*-like sequence

Gunnl 3 *Aðalráðsdrápa* (*stef* only) [praise]

Gunnl 6–8 Part of a *Sigtryggsdrápa*, in praise of Sigtryggr silkiskeggr.

Gunnl 21 ÞKolb *Gunndr* 1. One stanza of a *drápa* in praise of Gunnlaugr by Þórðr Kolbeinsson confirming that he killed two men, supporters of Hrafn, and Hrafn himself, in their final duel in Norway.

Hallfr 7 = Hfr *ErfÓl* 26b Lines from an *erfidrápa* for King Óláfr Tryggavson, in which Hallfreðr celebrates gaining the king as his godfather.

Hallfr 31 = Hfr *Eirdr* 1 *Stef* of a praise-poem for Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson, not otherwise preserved.

Heið 4, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17 Staggered stanzas from a probable *flokkr* celebrating the *Heiðarvíg* [Battle on the Heath] by Eiríkr viðsjá [the Wary].

Nj 27 Stanza attributed to Þorkell elfaraskáld commemorating Gunnarr's last stand, in which he wounded sixteen men and killed two. Possibly part of a longer commemorative poem.

Nj 28 (Add 25) Another commemorative stanza about the death of Gunnarr, renowned 'af heiðnum lýðum' [among heathen men], possibly from a longer poem, attributed to a Þormóðr Óláfsson, possibly the same as a fourteenth-century skald of that name.

Nj 53–63 = Anon *Darraðarljóð* [see also section B].

L. Miscellaneous

Band 5 Ófeigr rejoices in his success in hoodwinking the confederates and notes that he has been able to record his achievement in poetry.

Eg 2 Skallagrímr speaks a stanza about his work as a blacksmith

Eg 13–14 Egill in dialogue with Arnfiðr jarl's daughter.

Eg 32 Description of a ship being buffeted by a storm at sea.

Eg 66 Armóðr's daughter gives a warning to Egill and his men.

Eir 3 Men in Vínland catch sight of a uniped.

Flóam 1 The stump of an oar carved with runes speaks.

Gr 17–18 Grettir's account of breaking into the burial mound of Kárr the Old and stealing treasure [cf. *Harð* 8–12].

Gr 31–7 The *Sǫðulkolla* [Saddle-head] verses, described as *gamanvísur* [Jesting verses], a staged comic dialogue sequence between Grettir and Sveinn á Bakka, who accuses Grettir of stealing his horse.

Gunnl 2 A *helmingr* Gunnlaugr addresses to Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson about the evil intent of a retainer who has insulted him.

Gunnl 9 Gunnlaugr makes a diplomatic comparison between two rivals.

Hallfr 5–6 Hallfreðr and King Óláfr Tryggvason in disguise as Akkerisfrakki [Anchor-fluke] exchange stanzas after Hallfreðr's companions have lost their anchor in a storm off Niðaróss (Trondheim).

Hallfr 9–13 These stanzas express the thoughts of Hallfreðr as a reluctant convert from the old religion to the new, Christianity. They are staged as a dialogue between the poet and King Óláfr Tryggvason.

Hallfr 32 Description of a storm a sea as Hallfreðr is returning to Iceland. The ship's boom hits him 'við hjartasíðu mér' [on my heart side].

Harð 8–12 Hǫrðr and his companion Geirr break into the burial mound of a dead viking, Sóti, and steal his gold ring after Hǫrðr wrestles with him [see also section B above].

6

A Suitable Literary Style

Narrative Voice and the Voice of the Poet

One of the most significant characteristics of skaldic poetry as a literary form is its combination of interiority and exteriority. In narratological terms the combination manifests itself in the mixture of impersonal or third-person narrative forms on the one hand and, on the other, those that utilise the first-person voice of the speaker of the poetry, usually identified with that of the composer himself (rarely, herself). This combination of the personal and the impersonal appears to have characterised skaldic verse from the beginning, as witnessed by the earliest Norwegian court poetry from the late ninth and early tenth centuries, but in that early corpus it is clear that the third-person mode was dominant, while the first-person form (as well as being sometimes a form of direct address to the poem's recipient) was used as a marked, and therefore special, emphatic intervention on the part of the poet, who entered into his discourse to connect with his audience and clarify the emphasis he wanted to place upon the content of his verse. Sometimes that was a particular slant upon the subject matter itself, sometimes an indication of the speaker's own position with regard to the narrative or towards the patron for whom he was composing.[1]

One particular trope for which the first-person form was frequently used, often in combination with direct address to the patron, was the skald's reference to his own role as a poet and sharer in the divinely-acquired mead of poetry, as in Einarr skálaglamm [Tinkle-scales] Helgason's *Vellekla* [Lack of Gold] (Eskál *Vell* 1[1]):

> Hugstóran biðk heyra
> — heyr, jarl, Kvasis dreyra —
> foldar vǫrð á fyrða
> fjarðleggjar brim dreggjar.

[1] See Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 20 (1981), 276–304.

> Biðk hugstóran vǫrð foldar heyra á brim dreggjar fyrða fjarðleggjar; heyr, jarl, dreyra Kvasis.
>
> I bid the high-minded guardian of the land [RULER = Hákon jarl] listen to the surf of the dregs of the men of the fjord-bone [ROCK > DWARFS > POEM]; hear, jarl, the blood of Kvasir <mythical being> [POEM].

The Old Norse myth of the god Óðinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr and his daughter Gunnlǫð, to which Einarr's *helmingr* alludes,[2] laid the foundation for the claim of human poets to tell important truths and provided them with ready-made status as authorities to whom elite audiences were expected to listen with respect. In terms of poetic structure, interjections and intercalary clauses within the stanza referencing the mead of poetry myth function to assert the poet's position as an authority and keep it in the audience's mind.

In sagas of Icelanders there is an important shift in the relationship between skaldic poetry as discourse within a prose frame and the poetry itself, in that it is the prose text that identifies the composer and performer of the poetry it includes as a particular character in its narrative. The authority upon which the prose text does this is usually not discussed, although it can be assumed that it comes from the weight of oral tradition. The narrative voice of the prose text is authoritatively omniscient: 'Maðr er nefndr Ketill ok var kallaðr raumr' [A man is named Ketill and he was called 'giant'] begins *Vatnsdœla saga* [The Saga of the People of Vatnsdalur],[3] in a manner similar to the beginnings of many other sagas. The narrating voice of the saga also implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) vouches for the poetry attributed to the saga's various characters by placing it in certain locations within the text and introducing it with various formulae all asserting that the lines following were spoken by the character in a specific narrative context. Formulae include 'þá kvað X vísu' [then X spoke a stanza], 'þá kvað X' [then X said] and 'ok enn kvað hann' [and then he said], the last-named being used when the text includes a riff of stanzas without a prose break or with only a very short one. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the very structure of the family saga requires its audiences to believe (or at least willingly suspend their disbelief) that many people in saga Iceland were poets capable of composing stanzas in *dróttkvætt* [court metre] and sometimes in other verse forms. In Chapter 3 we saw how the creation of the nexus between prose and poetry in sagas of Icelanders also creates a fictive presumption of the poetry's authenticity: if

2 This myth is presented as a prose narrative near the beginning of the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (*SnE* 1998, I, pp. 3–5; Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Snorri Sturluson Edda* (London and Rutland, Vermont, 1987), pp. 61–4.

3 *ÍF* 8, p. 3.

the narrative tells a true story of the events and people of the past, so must the poetry attributed to those people because they are part of the narrative.

This narratological situation is different from that between prose and poetry in kings' sagas and other historical works. It has often been observed[4] that the attributional formulae used by prose writers in such sagas are distinguished from those used in sagas of Icelanders by their specification of the name of the composer of the poetry, the name of the poem and usually something of the circumstances that occasioned it. The narrating voice of *Eyrbyggja saga* adheres to this convention when the narrator introduces two stanzas from an encomium for Illugi svarti Hallkelsson into his text:[5] 'Svá kvað Oddr skáld í Illugadrápu' [Thus said the poet Oddr in the *drápa* about Illugi] and 'Svá segir Oddr í Illugadrápu' [So says Oddr in the *drápa* about Illugi]. The effect of such citations is not only to give extratextual information that is not available in the main narrative but to remove the context of the poet Oddr's creation and performance of his poem from the current narrative to another narrative outside it. The circumstances in which Oddr composed *Illugadrápa* are not revealed, but they are external to the narrative of *Eyrbyggja saga*, even though that narrative depends upon a knowledge of the same events that are alluded to in the poem.

The intertextual status of poetry within the prosimetrical fabric of sagas of Icelanders supports the fiction of the saga character as speaker of poetry at key points in its narrative, usually at moments of heightened emotion or conflict. This, combined with the implicit notion of Everyman as a poet, leads to a characteristic feature of the sub-genre: the often-observed contrast between the supposed objectivity of the saga prose and the personalised discourse of the poetry with which it is juxtaposed. This effective narratological technique may first have been worked out for the early group of poets' sagas (*skáldasögur*), in which the protagonists were mostly men who already had authoritative status as court poets. That status could then have easily been transferred to narratives of their 'off-duty' adventures at home in Iceland.[6]

4 See Introduction and references given there.

5 *ÍF* 4, pp. 31–2.

6 The idea that the role of skalds as poetic authorities in courtly contexts (and then in kings' sagas) could have been transferred to their roles as protagonists of *skáldasögur* and then generalised to poetically proficient characters in sagas of Icelanders as a group is plausible, both in terms of their likely chronological position amongst the earliest sagas of Icelanders and in terms of their subject matter; cf. Sigurður Nordal, 'Sagalitteraturen', in Sigurður Nordal (ed.), *Litteraturhistorie.* B. *Norge og Island*. Nordisk kultur 8B (Stockholm, 1953), pp. 180–288, at p. 250 and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets.* Ergänzungsbände zum

The Diction of Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders

The special diction that characterises skaldic poetry builds on the sagas of Icelanders' diverse narrative voices and enhances their literary effect. It would seem that, from its beginnings as an elite court poetry, skaldic diction emphasised its distinctiveness as an art form by drawing upon a vocabulary that employed many words that either did not occur in everyday discourse or did so relatively rarely.[7] This quality is most apparent in the many *heiti* or near-synonyms for particular lexical fields frequently used in poetry and available for the use of skalds, and in the kenning system of periphrastic noun phrases which stood in place of particular, usually stereotyped referents.[8] The literary effects of skalds' uses of both *heiti* and kennings were multiple, but two are germane to the present discussion of the dual characteristics of interiority and exteriority in skaldic poetry. On the one hand, their usage enabled poets to move from one dimension of a particular subject to another by skilfully varying a set of *heiti* or kennings, rather like turning a cut diamond in a powerful light source in order to reveal its differing facets. On the other hand, the deployment of kennings, in particular, usually enhanced the poetry's exteriority, because the very nature of the kenning involves the referent or addressee not being encoded directly in the text of the stanza or poem, but indirectly and impersonally through combinations of conventional base-words and determinants.[9] In the example above from *Vellekla*, Hákon

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Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 27 (Berlin and New York, 2001), pp. 172–90, at p. 181.

7 The degree of distinction between the Old Norse language of poetry and that of prose can be gauged from the current existence of two separate dictionaries of the medieval language, *ONP*: *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php> and the *Lexicon Poeticum*, first published by Sveinbjörn Egilsson in 1860, then in revised form by Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*. 2nd edn (Copenhagen, 1931), now currently under revision. There is, however, overlap between the two fields and many Old Norse words occur in both prose and poetic registers, sometimes with perceptible differences in their lexical meanings. Definitions of words in the *Lexicon Poeticum* are referred to by the abbreviation *LP*: followed by the head-word (italicised).

8 See further *A Note on Heiti and Kennings* on pp. xxxvii–xxxviii above and the definitions of the terms *heiti* and *kenning* in *SkP* I (2012), 1, General Introduction, §§5.1 Kenning and 5.2 *Heiti*, pp. lxx–lxxxix.

9 For example, the base-word (here *þing* 'assembly') of a kenning such as *Fbr* 26/2 'á þingi hrings' [at the assembly of the sword [BATTLE]] assumes the syntactic position of the element being paraphrased, the referent [BATTLE], while the determinant 'hrings' [of the sword] defines the respect in which the base-word can substitute for the unnamed referent, which is always extratextual. See *SkP* I (2012), 1, General Introduction, §5.1.1. A, pp. lxx–lxxiii.

jarl Sigurðarson (r. c. 970–95) is addressed as 'hugstóran vǫrð foldar' [the high-minded guardian of the land]. This conventional ruler-kenning would doubtless have flattered its addressee by suggesting his well-intentioned, authoritative qualities, but it could equally have been applied to any good ruler. It is only where the historical or textual context of an Old Norse poem has been sufficiently preserved that the decoding of a kenning and its specific referent (if it has one), such as [RULER = Hákon jarl], can be undertaken. Further, the information required to decode it is usually extratextual.[10]

The exteriority and impersonality of the skaldic kenning system's dominant mode worked very well in the social context of courtly encomia and, less frequently, political critiques of Norwegian and other rulers, within which skaldic poetry developed. It also allowed for the occasional change from a formal register, restricted to the praise of rulers, to a less formal, even jocular or scurrilous verbal field, which doubtless entertained audiences, partly by virtue of its very deviance from the norms of formality. An example here is the poetry of the Icelander Sneglu-Halli, who assumed the role of buffoon at the court of King Haraldr harðráði [Hard-rule] Sigurðarson (r. 1046–66) and was therefore able to cover a number of anecdotal and risqué topics in the eleven *lausavísur* (*SnH* Lv 1–11[II]) attributed to him in prose sources. It also allowed for court poets, such as Eyvindr skáldaspillir [Destroyer of Poets *or* Plagiarist] Finnsson (c. 915–90) and Sigvatr Þórðarson (active in the first half of the eleventh century), to compose *lausavísur* based on their personal experiences in their 'off-duty' moments and, to the extent that these have been preserved in prose sources, we may see them, as already suggested in this book's Introduction, as the counterparts to (and to some extent the precursors of) the more interior style of skaldic poetry that came to be favoured within sagas of Icelanders. An example of this more informal style is Eyv Lv 12[I]:

> Snýr á Svǫlnis vǫru
> — svá hǫfum inn sem Finnar
> birkihind of bundit
> brums — at miðju sumri.

Snýr á vǫru Svǫlnis at miðju sumri; hǫfum of bundit birkihind brums inn svá sem Finnar.

10 It is possible to personalise a kenning so that a specific referent is apparent to the hearer or reader by selecting a base-word or more often a determinant that narrows the field of reference to such an extent that only one single referent is possible, such as *Hallfr* 10/7 'frumverr Friggjar' [the first husband of Frigg <goddess>] [= Óðinn]. Here it is necessary to know that in Old Norse myth, Frigg was the wife of the god Óðinn, otherwise it would not be possible to decode the kenning. For this type of personal kenning, see the General Introduction to *SkP* I (2012), 1, pp. lxxvii–lxxix.

> It is snowing on the spouse of Svǫlnir <= Óðinn> [= Jǫrð (*jǫrð* 'earth')] in the middle of summer; we have tied up the bark-stripping hind of the bud [GOAT] inside just like the Saami.

This more interior and informal style was partly a result of the expansion of kenning subject fields (in the example here, a kenning for a goat) in addition to the regular martial and nautical subjects favoured in poetry about rulers and battles and partly a consequence of a general expansion of the subject matter and vocabulary of skaldic poetry to include topics from everyday life outside a courtly context.

Kennings in Sagas of Icelanders

Kennings for Men

Many of the kenning patterns and kenning referents of skaldic poetry composed for royal and aristocratic audiences in the period before the end of the twelfth century are also to be found in the poetry recorded in sagas of Icelanders. Among the most frequent referents of all skaldic verse are those from the lexical field of warfare, including kennings for battle itself, warriors, weapons and armour of all kinds, and the birds and beasts, such as eagles and wolves, associated with the bloody aftermath of battle.[11] Another major kenning field relates to the sea, ships and seafarers, a third to the functions of rulership or leadership and generosity, the last-named centred on a leader's distribution of wealth to his followers, usually envisaged in the form of gold. These fields, almost all related to male activities, continue to be productive in the poetry preserved in sagas of Icelanders (see Chapter 5 above) but have often struck modern readers as ill-matched to the characters in the sagas themselves, who are usually men and women, farmers, traders and housewives, living in various parts of Iceland and involved in quarrels and feuds of a local nature.

An example of this kind of discourse, one of many that could be adduced, is the first half of a stanza (*Korm* 40/1–4) attributed to the character

[11] Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden. Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Rheinische Beiträge und Hülfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde 1 (Bonn and Leipzig, 1921), hereafter abbreviated *Meissner* with page reference(s). *Meissner* is still the most accurate source that allows one to assess the categories of kennings within the Old Norse kenning system and to discover their extent and frequency. Another very useful study of the kenning system is Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Kenningsystemet: Forsøk på ein lingvistisk analyse' *Maal og minne* (1994), 5–50. Repr. in Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal (eds), trans. Peter G. Foote, *Selected Papers*. The Viking Collection 9 (Odense, 1997), pp. 16–67.

Hólmgǫngu [Duelling]-Bersi, first husband of Kormákr's beloved Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga*. Bersi is here reflecting on his experience as a dueller and ruefully predicting the end of his long career:

> Þótta ek, þás œri
> — ársagt es þat — vǫ́rum,
> hæfr í Hlakkar drífu
> hyrrunnum vel Gunnar.
>
> Ek þótta Gunnar hyrrunnum vel hæfr í drífu Hlakkar, þás vǫ́rum œri; þat es ársagt.
>
> I seemed to the trees of the fire of Gunnr <valkyrie> [(*lit*. 'fire-trees of Gunnr') SWORD > WARRIORS] very brave in the snowstorm of Hlǫkk <valkyrie> [BATTLE] when we were [I was] younger; that was said long ago.

Bersi's statement here, couched in the first person, assesses his career against the background provided by two conventional kennings for warriors and battle, both of which implicitly elevate his activities into the realm of supernaturally created weather events, raising his duelling career to heights of a cosmic nature. A similar effect is created by the many kennings that use base-words for gods and other supernatural figures when referring to human actors, such as Bersi's kenning (*Korm* 28/5, 8)) 'Freyr randa' [Freyr <god> of shields] [WARRIOR] for his duelling opponent, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson. It is difficult to know what value to give to the supernatural register of kennings of this kind, an issue discussed separately in the next section of the present chapter.

Perhaps the most common type of kenning for men in sagas of Icelanders is that which uses an agent noun of masculine gender as the base-word of a warrior-kenning, combining it with a determinant for a weapon or battle.[12] Thus a man may be an inciter, a launcher or dispatcher of battle, envisaged as a storm or hail of weapons, or the driver of a horse of the wave, if a seafarer-kenning is required.[13] These kennings build on the same kinds of kenning patterns found in earlier skaldic poetry in honour of kings and other rulers, such as Eskál *Vell* 5/3, 4[1] 'ǫrþeysir flausta' [the valiant racer of ships] [SEAFARER] and 6/1, 2[1] 'eiðvandr oddneyir' [the oath-true arrow-user] [WARRIOR], both kennings for Hákon jarl Sigurðarson. In the context of sagas of Icelanders, however, this type of kenning is capable of considerable contextual flexibility of meaning, especially when it includes epithets pointedly characterising its referent or employing determinants of

12 See *Meissner* 245–7, 274–7.

13 *Meissner* 278.

an unusual kind. Two examples recorded in *Eyrbyggja saga* illustrate this point. *Eyrbyggja saga* includes poetry of quite diverse kinds, which offers contrasting perspectives on one of the main protagonists of this and several other sagas of Icelanders, Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson. Þormóðr Trefilsson's *Hrafnsmál* [Words of the Raven] (ÞTref *Hrafn*) uses a number of warrior-kennings to praise Snorri *goði* and present him as an effective fighter, such as *Eb* 34/I, 3 'inn móðbarri týnir tjǫrreinar' [the courageous destroyer of the spear-land] [SHIELD > WARRIOR = Snorri *goði*].[14] On the other hand, *Eyrbyggja saga* also includes the *Máhlíðingarvísur* [Verses of the People of Mávahlíð] composed by Þórarinn svarti [the Black] Þórólfsson, who seeks justice for himself after he had been involved in killing a man in a local feud in which Snorri *goði* had an interest. As might be expected, Þórarinn's use of agent nouns and epithets referring to Snorri is much less flattering than Þormóðr's. In a kenning with a unique determinant, Snorri is described (*Eb* 5/I, 2, 4) as 'vitr vekjandi lǫgráns' [the clever awakener of law-robbery] [ADVERSARY AT LAW = Snorri *goði*]. The determinant here is a legal term (*lǫgrán*) which conveys Þórarinn's fear that Snorri might rob him of legal recourse, deny him his legal rights.[15]

The fact that the traditionally dominant fields of the kenning corpus are carried over into the poetry of sagas of Icelanders is significant. Firstly it means that the element of exteriority characteristic of skaldic diction is carried over into its new prose setting, and secondly it indicates that both the poets and their audiences must have appreciated hearing themselves represented as warriors and seafarers and fighting on a stage comparable to that on which the wars and political manoeuvres of foreign kings and jarls were played out. In other words, the pronouncedly elitist and aristocratic character of skaldic poetry in its originary setting was transferred to the new setting provided by the process of embedding skaldic poetry in a prose matrix describing the lives of Icelanders of the tenth and early eleventh centuries.

The field of kenning patterns referring to male characters who are despicable, cowardly or otherwise dishonourable, at least from the perspective of the poet and/or narrator, reveals by virtue of its antithetical nature the elitist character of the kenning patterns poets were in the habit of using for their heroes. By contrast with kennings comparing saga protagonists to warriors, seafarers or gods of the pre-Christian religion, the enemies of these poet-protagonists are usually depicted as agricultural labourers, kitchen hands and sometimes craftsmen, whose spheres of activity encompass the farmyard, the kitchen

14 The prose text (*Eb* ch. 56, *ÍF* 4, p. 154) covering the fight in which Snorri is involved is noticeably less fulsome in his praise, and it is unclear from the prose whether he actually killed the two men concerned himself, or more likely ordered their killing by others.

15 See Kate Heslop's note to this kenning in her edition of *Máv* (*Eb* 3–19) in *SkP* V.

and the workshop rather than the field of battle or the stormy ocean. There are numerous examples of such derogatory man-kennings in the corpus. Their base-words are usually agent nouns, while their determinants denote the demeaning, usually agricultural or domestic fields in which they are said to operate. Sometimes a god-name may be used ironically as the base-word of a kenning for a low-class or despicable person. For example, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson refers to one of his enemies, Narfi, as 'fœðir frenju' [the feeder of the cow] (*Korm* 14/1) and, in lines 1–2 of the same stanza, as 'ófróðr Áli orfa' [the unwise Áli <legendary king> of scythes]. Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld 'Troublesome poet' Óttarsson similarly characterises his beloved Kolfinna's husband Gríss in *Hallfreðar saga* as 'ófríðr stríðir orfa' [unhandsome enemy of scythes].[16] Kormákr's contempt for his lover Steingerðr's second husband, Þorvaldr tinteinn Eysteinsson, as a 'tindrǫ́ttr maðr' [a tin-drawing man], although not in the form of a kenning, points to the subject of trade and craftsmanship as another field of skaldic derogation.[17] The language of insult (*níð*) was clearly a long-established and productive field for Nordic poets and had a long prehistory.[18] However, the rather formulaic nature of derogatory kennings for men in sagas of Icelanders extends the linguistic resources of this field considerably.

The stark contrast in kenning formation for male referents, depending on whether they were valued positively or negatively as members of Icelandic society, reveals more than most other elements of skaldic diction the elitist, even aristocratic habitus of skaldic poetry within sagas of Icelanders, and suggests that one of the reasons why poetry found a valued place in many sagas was because it endorsed a kind of wish-fulfilment on the part of its audiences, who could imagine themselves as warriors and seafarers even

16 *Hallfr* 19/5, 6; cf. the similar 'ófríðr orfþægir' [unhandsome scythe-shover] (*Hallfr* 20/5, 6). Another of Hallfreðr's enemies, Már Jǫrundarson, is called a 'sannargr allheiðinn søkkvir margra troga' [truly unmanly, totally heathen sinker of many troughs] (*Hallfr* 2/1, 2), which appears to be a reference to this man's performance of heathen cults (there is a similar reference in *Hallfr* 26/7–8). If so, as Whaley notes in her edition apropos this kenning, the pejorative reference to pre-Christian activities raises the question of whether the stanza in which it occurs can be authentically pre-Christian itself. Cf. 'brjótr kumbla' [breaker of burial mounds] [CONTEMPTIBLE MAN], a kenning used of Bárðr in *Egils saga* (*Eg* 8/2, 3) and Narfi in *Kormáks saga* (*Korm* 22/8).

17 *Korm* 51/4; cf. *Korm* 57, in which Kormákr alludes contemptuously to Þorvaldr's dung-sledge (*myksleði*) and other farmyard equipment.

18 On *níð* see the studies by Folke Ström, *Níð, Ergi and Old Norse Moral Attitudes*. The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies (University College London, 1974) and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre. The Viking Collection 1 (Odense, 1983).

though they and their heroes were actually farmers and smallholders living in a particular geographical district of Iceland. The sense of wish-fulfilment and self-aggrandisement would have been even more intense for any descendants of the saga characters who may have sponsored the composition of a saga or been among the audience when it was read aloud. The incongruity between what must have been the reality of life in Iceland for most people, even members of the chieftain class, and the depiction in skaldic kennings of warriors, on the one hand, and farm labourers on the other, is clearly apparent once these kenning patterns are deconstructed.

Kennings and the Supernatural World

Many kennings in the poetry of sagas of Icelanders involve the use of base-words and sometimes determinants implicitly comparing the subjects of these sagas, Icelandic men and women of earlier centuries, to supernatural figures, usually gods and goddesses of the pre-Christian religion and other exotic figures like legendary heroes, sea-kings and valkyries. For example, Hólmgǫngu-Bersi refers to himself in one stanza (*Korm* 44/5, 6) as 'Ullr mara þoptu' [The Ullr <god> of the horses of the rowing-bench] [SHIPS > WARRIOR = I, Bersi]. It is hard for a modern analyst to assess the semiotic impact of this practice and what it might have meant for the various audiences who listened to such kennings. Is the comparison between a saga character and a god of the old religion merely decorative, or does it have greater semiotic force? How did such references to the old gods affect saga audiences in the thirteenth century and later, assuming that these audiences were Christians, listening to stories and poems about people of a pre-Christian age, composed, so the texts would have them believe, by poets who lived before the Conversion or about that time? Presumably, if the poetry was authentically early, both the poets and their contemporary audiences would still have followed the pre-Christian religion and so accepted references to it in good faith. It would, however, be simplistic to assume that these audiences understood the human subjects of such poetry to be lifted into the divine sphere, and yet it is hardly to be supposed that they would have been insensitive to the elevating function of such comparisons, comparisons that are for the most part completely conventional, rather like the classical allusions of eighteenth-century European poetry and drama.[19] Later audiences, while

[19] The classical locus for the transfer of a poet's attachment from the old gods of the pre-Christian religion to the new Christian regime is Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's stanzas on this subject in *Hallfr* 9–13; see Diana Whaley, 'The "Conversion Verses" in *Hallfreðar saga*: Authentic Voice of a Reluctant Christian?', in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*. The Viking Collection 14 (Odense, 2003), pp. 234–57.

perceiving the elevating function of such comparisons, would probably have understood references to the gods and legendary heroes of the past as a sign of the antiquity of the poetry as the work of poets from an earlier world of belief, and so appropriately ornamented with references to pagan deities, which they could then appreciate in purely conventional terms.[20] Alternatively, if the poetry was in fact *not* the work of a tenth-century skald and the audience recognised it as of later origin, they might have appreciated it as an antiquarian pastiche of older modes of thought and speech.

Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audiences are likely to have been aware that the advent of Christianity to Iceland and Norway brought about a significant temporary reduction in references to pre-Christian mythology in the poetry of eleventh- and twelfth-century skalds.[21] The reduction of specific denotative meaning apparent in the poets' use of names for mythological beings in the *Íslendingasögur* corpus thus provokes the question of whether this development was simply to provide a mechanism for a needed expansion in the semiotic field appropriate to a more diverse human subject matter compared to that of kings' sagas or whether it reflected a loss of theophoric strength associated with the deities themselves around the time of the change of religion (*siðaskipti*) from paganism to Christianity and indeed after the Conversion had taken place. In sagas of Icelanders, in which the poetry may be of different periods ranging from the tenth century (in some cases) to the fourteenth, the use of god-kennings denuded of referential meaning seems to have enabled poets to bypass the conceptual difficulties posed by the change in religion that occurred during the period of the sagas' active composition.

20 Mikael Males, *The Poetic Genesis of Old Icelandic Literature* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), ch. 2, pp. 39–101, divides kennings that refer to the pre-Christian religion and mythology into two groups, those that he terms generic mythological references, involved, for example, in using a base-word for a god in a man-kenning or a valkyrie determinant in a battle-kenning, and those that allude to specific Old Norse myths, such as Óðinn's acquisition of the poetic mead or Þórr's encounter with the giant Geirrøðr. He sees the latter group as offensive to adherents of the new religion of Christianity (and so suppressed in eleventh- and early twelfth-century poetry), while the former were anodyne, according to him, because they did not presuppose a specific pagan belief, and were therefore retained, apparently in spite of their references to pre-Christian deities. In the absence of clear religious doctrine specific to the old religion, however, it is difficult to see why its myths would have offended people more than its gods' names.

21 See Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Pagan Beliefs and Christian Impact: The Contribution of Scaldic Studies', in Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins (eds.), *Viking Revaluations: Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992* (University College London, 1993), pp. 100–20.

The Feminisation of Literary Discourse in Sagas of Icelanders

The limited roles for women as agents in Old Norse court poetry of the period before the thirteenth century is neither unexpected nor undocumented. Both Roberta Frank and Bjarne Fidjestøl have shown how, in the kings' saga corpus, women are represented as spectators and onlookers of men's actions, if they are represented at all.[22] At most, their inscription in skaldic verse in a courtly or martial setting gives added value to male behaviour by simply witnessing it and tacitly or openly admiring it. There are some rare exceptions to this generalisation, including the three surviving stanzas of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Poem about Queen Ástríðr* (Sigv *Ást*[I], c. 1035), but for the most part female characters are either absent from Old Norse court poetry or peripheral to it.

There was much debate during the twentieth century about whether the increased interest in women as subjects of Old Norse poetry from about the mid-twelfth century onward is attributable to the influence of the growing popularity of the ideology of courtly love in southern parts of Europe or whether it was a largely home-grown phenomenon.[23] Beginning with some of the *lausavísur* of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson, Jarl of Orkney (d. 1158 or 1159), and manifesting itself also in several probably Orcadian poems from the late twelfth century,[24] it is undeniable that at least the most characteristic trait of courtly love in the form of (usually unrequited) devotion to a woman was influential in Orkney and may have made its way to Iceland to inspire the authors of the so-called *skáldasögur* 'poets' sagas', to compose

22 Bjarne Fidejstøl, '"Ut no glitter dei fagre droser": Om kvinnesynet i norrøn litteratur', *Syn og Segn*, 82 (1976), 464–72. Repr. as '"Out they will look, the lovely ladies." Views of Women in Norse Literature', in Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal (eds), *Selected Papers*, trans. Peter G. Foote. The Viking Collection 9 (Odense, 1997), pp. 333–42; Roberta Frank, 'Why Skalds Address Women', in Teresa Pàroli (ed.), *Atti del 12. Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull' Alto Medioevo: Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages. The Seventh International Saga Conference* (Spoleto, 1990), pp. 67–83.

23 See, among other studies, Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur: Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldasagnanna fornu* (Reykjavík, 1961); Theodore M. Andersson, 'Skalds and Troubadours', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 2 (1969), 7–41; Alison Finlay, 'Skalds, Troubadours and Sagas', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 24 (1995), 105–53.

24 Particularly the anonymous *Málsháttakvæði* [Proverb poem] (Anon *Mhkv*[III]) and Bjarni byskup Kolbeinsson's *Jómsvíkingsdrápa* [*Drápa* about the Jómsvíkingar] (Bjbp *Jóms*[I]). This group may also include Ormr Steinþórsson's *Poem about a woman*, which has some similarities in its treatment of the love theme to the other two, and may date from the same period, the late twelfth century, according to its latest editor, Russell Poole (Ormr *Woman*[III]).

several narratives centred on the unhappy love affairs of four Icelandic poets, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson, Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi 'Champion of the People of Hítardalur' Arngeirsson and Gunnlaugr ormstunga 'Serpent-Tongue' Illugason.[25] However, as not a few scholars have remarked apropos these sagas, and as we have already noted in Chapter 5, there are some major differences between the poetry of courtly love in Catalan, French and other European languages and the stanzas in the poets' sagas, which are as much preoccupied with rivalry between men for the love of a woman as with the emotions of a subservient, devoted lover. Furthermore, the lover-poets who are portrayed in these sagas are presented as having lived and composed poetry in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, well before the literary fashion for courtly love could have taken hold, although the poets' sagas as *prosimetra* probably belong to the early to mid-thirteenth century.

While the influence of the literature of courtly love may have been of some importance in the evolution of the poets' sagas, the various developments in the literary fields involved in the presentation of female characters in sagas of Icelanders reflect a much more general and wide-ranging change in poetic discourse and (probably, at least to some extent) in local culture. It is true that female characters in sagas of Icelanders are still largely seen through men's eyes and are still represented as relatively powerless in matters of law, politics, marriage and the management of landed property, but their importance in the domain of the emotions and relationships with men is a literary field that poetry in sagas of Icelanders was able to exploit. It did so through the development of certain kinds of woman-kennings and the use of an enlarged and more complex vocabulary for the expression of bodily and emotional states and relationships. In sagas from the fourteenth century and later, such as *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *Víglundar saga*, *Harðar saga* and the additional poetry of *Njáls saga*, female characters are sometimes given their own stanzas to articulate the situations they find themselves in, rather than being represented through the poetry assigned to male characters. This is a further feminisation of the poetry characteristic of late sagas of Icelanders and is discussed in Chapter 7.[26]

[25] Several love verses of a fifth poet, Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi [Champion of the People of Breiðafjörður] Ásbrandsson, have also been recorded in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*Eb* 24–5, 27–31).

[26] The issue of giving a poetic voice to female characters is separate from the question of the authenticity or inauthenticity of stanzas attributed to women. When poets and saga writers give their female characters a voice (often through the voice of a male character, sometimes independently), they involve them as agents in the saga narrative. Most earlier editors of skaldic poetry have approached the poetry attributed to female characters solely in terms of whether

Kennings for Women

By contrast with the types of man-kennings used in the poetry of sagas of Icelanders, kennings for women present some very interesting innovations in this corpus in comparison with woman-kennings found in kings' sagas. Not only are woman-kennings much more common as a general rule in sagas of Icelanders, reflecting the greater attention paid to female characters in many such sagas, but the variety of kenning types is also greater. A number of the sagas of Icelanders usually considered to belong among the earliest (see Chapter 1) have relationships between men and woman at their core or at least as matters of importance in their narratives. Aside from the four poets' sagas, there are parts of *Egils saga* that involve female characters, including Egill's wife Ásgerðr, formerly his brother's wife, and the complicated issues of her inheritance consequent upon their marriage. There are also seven stanzas of *Eyrbyggja saga* (*Eb* 24–5, 27–31) concerned with the extramarital affair of Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi and Þuríðr Barkardóttir, which led to the birth of their son Kjartan, as well as the single whetting stanza attributed to Þuríðr Óláfsdóttir pá (*Heið* 3) in *Heiðarvíga saga*. *Fóstbrœðra saga* includes the very amusing episode of Þormóðr's unwise recycling of poetry he had already composed for Þorbjǫrg kolbrún [Coal-brow] Glúmsdóttir to gain the affection of another woman, Þórdís Grímudóttir. Þorbjǫrg finds out about this, appears to Þormóðr in a dream, and causes him searing pain in the eyes, all of which he mentions in *Fbr* 9. In sagas from the period usually dated 1250–80, *Gísla saga* is of key importance in extending the discourse field of women's interests and behaviour within saga texts. Gísli's wife, Auðr, his sister Þórdís, and the dream-women who visit him during his outlawry have important roles in their various interactions with the saga hero.

The subject of a man's sexual attraction to and love for a woman married to another man is one of the main preoccupations of the four skald sagas and the poetry attributed to Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi in *Eyrbyggja saga*. If, as most scholars suppose, these sagas belong among the earliest sagas of Icelanders to have been composed, with the poetry within them the work of skalds active in the tenth or early eleventh centuries,[27] their expanded subject matter is likely to have required a similar early expansion of the available resources of skaldic diction. A plethora of woman-kennings, whose base-words are the names of goddesses and valkyries, is the most

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it is authentic or not, and have invariably come down on the side of inauthenticity, rather than appreciating it as part of the whole saga narrative.

27 See Chapter 3. The exceptions to this generalisation are parts of *Bjarnar saga* and the whole of *Gunnlaugs saga*, which probably contains a number of stanzas of doubtful authenticity; see Diana Whaley's Introduction to her edition of *Gunnl* in *SkP* V.

obvious sign of this expansion. Not only the best-known goddesses of the pre-Christian world, such as Frigg and Freyja, but also many figures whose characters and functions in the pantheon are quite shadowy are brought into play in kennings that form the subjects of skaldic discourse, a good part of it in sagas of Icelanders.

In the first three stanzas of *Kormáks saga* there are several woman-kennings, all referring to Steingerðr, that employ goddess- or valkyrie-base-words: 'fald-Gerðr' [headdress-Gerðr <goddess>] [WOMAN] (*Korm* I/6), 'Hrist brims lauka' [the Hrist <valkyrie> of the surf of leeks] [ALE > WOMAN] (*Korm* 3/2, 3, 4), 'Fríðr gollmens' [the Fríðr <goddess> of the gold necklace] [WOMAN] (*Korm* 3/6) and 'Hlín hringa' [the Hlín <goddess> of rings] [WOMAN] (*Korm* 3/7, 8). This saga and others in which female characters figure prominently, such as *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa* and *Gísla saga*, use a large range of such kennings and enlist names as base-words that were probably not originally goddess-names, like Gerðr, the name of a giantess, but frequent in skaldic usage to denote a woman, and Fríðr, which is not found in the poetic treatises as a goddess-name.[28] Hlín, another popular goddess-name in woman-kennings, is probably in origin another name for the goddess Frigg (cf. *Vǫluspá* 53/I–2). A paragraph in the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*[29] lists and characterises fourteen of these obscure female figures, arguably with the practice of contemporary skaldic kenning composition in mind.[30] It is probably significant that Snorri goes on immediately to quote a list of valkyrie-names, including Hrist, from the eddic poem *Grímnismál*. In sagas of Icelanders valkyrie-names seem to function in woman-kennings more or less as goddess-names do, without any special significance connected to their role in escorting the slain to Valhǫll from the field of battle. On the other hand, valkyrie-names commonly occur with these latter connotations

28 One of the earliest examples of Gerðr as a goddess-name occurs in the refrain of the mid-eleventh-century *Gamanvísur* [Jesting *Vísur*] attributed to King Haraldr harðráði [Hard-rule] Sigurðarson, 'Gerðr gollhrings' [Gerðr <goddess> of the gold ring], a reference to his bride-to-be, Ellísif, daughter of Jaroslav, ruler of Novgorod. The name Fríðr [beautiful one] occurs in Þul *Kvenna II* 3/5[III], but not among the names for goddesses in either the *þulur* or in *Snorra Edda*. Nevertheless, it seems to function here and elsewhere as if it were a goddess-*heiti* (cf. *LP*: *2. Fríðr*; *SnE* 1998, II, p. 459).

29 *SnE* 2005, pp. 29–30.

30 John Lindow, 'Snorri's Ásynjur', in Stefan Brink (ed.), *Theorizing Old Norse Myth* (Turnhout, 2018), pp. 131–49 argues that the list of goddesses is not based on traditional lore but is intended to mirror the preceding list of fourteen gods. He surmises that it may have been influenced by the Christian cults of saints, particularly the Virgin Mary.

as the determinants of kennings for battle, such as *Hallfr* 17/6, 8 'él Hlakkar' [the storm of Hlǫkk <valkyrie>] [BATTLE].

Like man-kennings with god-names as base-words, woman-kennings with base-words for supernatural beings also impart a sense of social elevation and cultural significance to their referents. However, of equal importance to the semiotics of the poetry in sagas of Icelanders is the way in which the determinants of such woman-kennings extend the field of reference of the discourse as a whole to include the domestic sphere of women's work and women's interests. The determinant of a kenning characteristically seeks to define the lexical field to which the base-word applies, as, for example, in the kenning 'Hrist brims lauka' [the Hrist <valkyrie> of the surf of leeks] [ALE > WOMAN] quoted in the previous paragraph. The determinant here, formed by a subordinate kenning, 'the surf of leeks', denotes the field of alcoholic drink, together with the herbs that were gathered to flavour it, and so, by inference, the role of women in brewing and serving it to men. Determinants of woman-kennings may refer to articles of clothing or bodily decoration (ribbons, headdresses, linen garments, rings, jewels, gold), parts of the female body (arm, hand) or typically female household tasks (brewing, needlework, bed-making and bedclothes).[31] Thus many determinants of the numerous woman-kennings in the poets' sagas and elsewhere in sagas of Icelanders expand the inscription of the domestic sphere of human activity into the poetry well beyond the confines of the largely male world established for court poetry.

Given the richness of the kenning fields for female subjects in sagas of Icelanders, it is interesting to observe several modifications to the standard practice of kenning formation that occur particularly in woman-kennings.[32] Earlier skaldic editors have doubted the authenticity of these modifications, which can be understood as a simplification and concentration of some frequently used kenning patterns. In spite of earlier editors' doubts, the simplifications occur already in sagas of Icelanders generally accepted as early, such as *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*. Because they considered them signs of late and implicitly inferior composition, many editors have often emended the texts in which they are found in order to make regular kennings out of what they have deemed flawed expressions, but the existence of such modifications in early poetry is clear.[33]

Two frequent woman-kenning patterns are often simplified and have been termed 'incomplete' (*unvollständig*) by earlier scholars;[34] the pattern 'goddess

31 See *Meissner* 413–18.

32 These modifications seem not to have been confined to sagas of Icelanders, however, as some examples occur outside that corpus; cf. Hharð Lv 14/2, 3[II].

33 See Hans Sperber, 'Kann "Göttin des Meeres" eine Kenning für "Frau" bilden?', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 26 (1910), 288–93 and *Meissner* 419–20.

34 Cf. *Meissner* 419: 'Eine Eigentümlichkeit der Frauenkenningar ist, daß in zwei

of the fire of the sea' becomes 'goddess of the sea' and 'goddess of the fire of the arm or hand' becomes 'goddess of the arm or hand', thus eliminating the 'fire/light' element of the sub-kenning which conventionally denotes gold, a jewel or a precious stone. An example of the first type is 'Vǫ́r bǫ́ru' [Vǫ́r <goddess> of the wave] [WOMAN] (*Korm* 70/6) and of the second 'Hlín klifs hauka' [Hlín <goddess> of the cliff of hawks] [ARM > WOMAN] (*Eg* 23/3, 4). In some examples, the 'goddess' base-word can be substituted with a woman-*heiti* like 'tree (of feminine gender)' or 'prop', as in 'eik landa ǫglis' [the oak of the lands of the hawk] [ARMS > WOMAN] (Þorm Lv 25/1, 2[1]).[35]

Some further characteristics of kennings for both men and women, which are not confined to poetry in sagas of Icelanders, though they frequently occur there, are practices that allow poets to concentrate a number of references to a specific subject into a small number of verse lines. This has the effect of intensifying the poet's focus on his subject and also allows him to introduce a greater range of descriptive elements into his character portraits. One such practice is the poets' use of verbal elements affixed to the base-word of a kenning, usually an agent noun or the name of a deity, so as to complete the kenning within the compound word thus created and to have it function as the subject or object of the clause in which the kenning appears.[36] Kennings for both men and women employ this very flexible resource, in which the semantic value of the affixed element can interact variously with the rest of the kenning or with other elements of the clause to which it belongs.[37] For example, in the kenning 'gegni-Gautar geirfitjar' [receiving-Gautar <= Óðinns> of the spear-meadow] [SHIELD > WARRIORS] (*Korm* 50/3–4), the element *gegni-* combines with the semantic field of the subordinate shield-kenning to enhance the martial context in which it is placed.

Another source of semantic concentration is the use of base-words alone, rather than kennings comprising both base-word and determinant, to denote a referent. These stand-alone base-words are usually termed 'half-kennings' and have long been considered a stylistic defect characteristic of late skaldic poetry,

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Gruppen die Bestimmung unvollständig sein kann' [One peculiarity of women-kennings is that in two groups the determinant can be incomplete.]

35 As *Meissner* 419 has noted, this simplification of the kenning system was recognised in the Appendix to the Y version of the *Laufás Edda* (Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Two Versions of Snorra Edda from the 17th Century*, Volume I. *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar* (Reykjavík, 1979), p. 377: 'kienna skal konu vid gull og allt glys þeirra, so vid ólkerolld og dryckiu, kienna mä þær vid steinaheite óll so til handar og sjöar' [a woman shall be paraphrased in terms of gold and all their finery, also [in terms of] ale-vats and drink; they can be paraphrased in terms of all stone-*heiti* and also [in terms of] "arm" and "sea"].

36 See *Meissner* 280–3, 420–1.

37 Affixed verbal elements also facilitate alliteration, and this may well have been a non-semantic reason for their adoption.

but they occur in earlier texts too, though, like the 'incomplete' kennings, they have often been emended away by modern editors or judged to be corrupt.[38] A half-kenning may be defined as a known base-word used without a determinant to denote a particular referent of the Old Norse kenning system. An example is *Fbr* 9/6 *Þrúðr kann mart in prúða* 'the stately Þrúðr <goddess> [woman] knows much'. A regular woman-kenning using the base-word Þrúðr, in Norse myth the name of the god Þórr's daughter, but here functioning as a goddess-name, would provide a determinant, typically alluding to some womanly activity or women's clothing or ornaments, but here the base-word alone denotes the referent without the aid of a determinant in a kind of skaldic shorthand. It follows that such base-words chosen to serve as half-kennings are likely to have been in common use among poets so that their referents could be easily guessed by the intended audience. Very often we find half-kennings used in intercalary clauses or in direct address to the stanza's subject, often a woman, where the identity of the referent of the half-kenning is usually obvious.

The surmise that half-kennings are likely to employ well-known base-words is borne out by the majority of examples of this usage in the skaldic corpus. They fall into two basic categories, proper names of goddesses or valkyries used to refer to the female subjects of skaldic stanzas, such as the example above, or common nouns, frequently *heiti*, that normally serve in regular kennings as base-words in man- or woman-kennings but are used on their own as half-kennings. Examples of the latter category are *runnr* 'bush [man]' and *þella* 'fir-tree [woman]', both of which are common as base-words in complete kennings. So we find in *Nj* 50/3 *runnar unnu þat rangt* 'the bushes [men] allow that wrongly'. There is a smaller number of half-kennings for weapons or armour in the repertoire, mainly from outside the corpus of sagas of Icelanders.

Representations of the Inner and Bodily Life[39]

Those sagas of Icelanders that may well be among the earliest, in terms of their compilation as prosimetric texts, include poetry in markedly different

[38] See Hans Sperber, 'Zur Frage der sogenannten Hálfkenningar', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 26 (1910), 276–88. For a fuller discussion of half-kennings, see the section on stylistic characteristics of poetry in sagas of Icelanders in the Introduction to *SkP* V. Examples of half-kennings identified by editors of poetry in *SkP* are cited in an Appendix to this section of the Introduction.

[39] In this section I depart to some extent from Guðrún Nordal's analysis of body imagery in skaldic verse in her *Tools of Literacy. The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001), pp. 237–68. She concludes that body imagery was relatively rare in early skaldic verse and that body-kennings did not generally appear until the late thirteenth century. This may be true of kennings for body-parts seen as specific, stand-alone individual entities, but the kind of diction

modes and voices. In Chapter 2 I argued that it is significant that compilers and redactors of sagas of Icelanders by and large avoided poetry of a formal or semi-official kind, aside from a small number of examples, even though there is strong empirical evidence that such poetry existed and may have survived into the thirteenth century in greater abundance than the literary record has preserved. I argued further that the reason for this avoidance was probably the saga compilers' desire to prefer poetry in a largely interior mode, one that revealed the inner lives of their characters, over formal poetry about battles and heroes following the models available from poetry of the Norwegian court. It was not that poetry in sagas of Icelanders ceased to deal with battles and fights, but rather that its focus was now upon interpersonal conflicts between rival families or individuals. At the same time, as I have argued so far in the present chapter, the subject of interpersonal relations between men and women was opening up new fields for poetic treatment in terms of its subject matter and how that was handled stylistically.

If we assume that the activity of prosimetric compilation was beginning to take shape at some time during the late twelfth century, and had adopted a form recognisable from the earliest manuscripts at some time in the early thirteenth century, it is necessary to this hypothesis for some poetry in a predominantly interior mode to have already existed and been available for compilers to use from the beginning of the development of the *Íslendingasaga* sub-genre, unless one subscribes to the view that all poetry in sagas of Icelanders is the work of twelfth- and thirteenth-century imitators. In early sagas such as *Heiðarvíga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* we can see the result of a rather superficial and incongruous mixing of poetry in exterior and interior modes. On the one hand we have the authenticating voices of Eiríkr viðsjá, Tindr Hallkelsson, Oddr breiðfirðingr and Þormóðr Trefilsson, while on the other the compilers of these two sagas include a woman's whetting stanza (*Heið* 3), stanzas about a domestic dispute and two dreams (*Heið* 5–9), the poetry in the episode about Víga-Styrr and two Swedish berserks (*Eb* 21–3) and the romance of Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi and Þuríðr Barkardóttir (*Eb* 24–5, 27–31). Whether or not these latter stanzas were the compositions of men and women of the tenth and early eleventh centuries (and there is good reason to suspect at least some of them of being composed post-1200),[40] it can be seen that these stanzas, in subject matter and style, belong in the interior or situational mode, in marked contrast to the other, probably older, poetry in authenticating mode.

If many of the stanzas in the two earliest poets' sagas, *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*, are indeed the compositions of tenth-century skalds, the interior mode must have been well established in skaldic poetry before

analysed here involves a more holistic somatic imagery strongly connected to the representation of the emotions.

40 See the discussion in Chapter 3.

it came to be combined with prose. The existence among the earliest sagas of Icelanders of the poets' sagas as a prominent group utilising a particular literary recipe for success[41] supports the notion that the interior world of a poet in love (and in rivalry with a male opponent, who was also often known as a poet) was a popular topic among Icelandic audiences by the early thirteenth century. Nevertheless, elements of exteriority, especially in the form of kennings, remain in the poetry in early sagas of Icelanders and are in fact germane to its very nature. The saga writer's task was to combine these structural and semantic elements with new resources of poetic diction in order to open up fields of discourse that had either not been attempted before or had only been treated in a limited fashion. Some examples of the new style of using the formal resources of skaldic verse in combination with an interior focus on the saga characters' inner lives are now explored.

The first ten stanzas of *Kormáks saga*, discussed in earlier chapters, represent the immediate sexual attraction that grows between Kormákr and Steingerðr at their first meeting. The beginning of *Korm* 4 describes how Steingerðr, alerted to Kormákr's interest in her, first provoked by the sight of the instep of her foot, stares back at him from beneath the protective but sinister bearded head of the legendary Hagbarðr:[42]

> Hofat lind (né leyndak)
> líð*s* (hyrjar því stríði)
> — bands mank beið*i*-Rindi —
> baugsœm af mér augu.

Baugsœm lind líð*s* hofat augu af mér; né leyndak því stríði hyrjar; mank beið*i*-Rindi bands.

The ring-adorned linden tree of strong drink [WOMAN = Steingerðr] did not lift her eyes from me; I did not conceal that affliction of fire; I remember the imploring-Rindr <goddess> of the ribbon [WOMAN].

41 Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features', in Russell Poole (ed.), *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 25–49.

42 Hagbarðr was the lover of a woman named Signý, whose father Sigarr had him hanged. Most references to Hagbarðr in skaldic poetry occur in kennings for the gallows or otherwise allude to his unfortunate fate (cf. *Meissner* 435). Although the story of this tragic love affair must have been widely known in early and medieval Scandinavia, the only extended telling of it from medieval times survives in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (see Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.), trans. Peter Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum The History of the Danes*. 2 vols (Oxford, 2015), I, vii. 7. 3 – 7. 17, pp. 478–93. An image of Hagbarðr's head was apparently carved on the woodwork near the entrance to the hall where Steingerðr was staying.

The erotic power of this and other stanzas of *Korm* I–10 derives from the combination of kennings loaded with descriptive detail (such as the adjective *baugsœm* [ring-adorned] of line 4) and direct statements of the protagonists' bodily or emotional reactions presented as the perceptions of the narrating first-person voice ('hofat augu af mér' [[she] did not lift her eyes from me] and 'né leyndak því stríði hyrjar' [I did not conceal that affliction of fire]).[43]

Another example of poetic diction that combines kennings with direct statements of the speaking voice's perceptions and feelings is Egill Skalla-Grímsson's lament (*Eg* 17) over the death of his brother Þórólfr in battle:

> Gekk, sás óðisk ekki, Jǫrð grœr, en vér verðum,
> jarlmanns bani snarla Vínu nær of mínum,
> (þreklundaðr fell) Þundar — helnauð es þat —
> (Þórolfr) í gný stórum. hylja harm, ágæt*um* barma.

> Bani jarlmanns, sás óðisk ekki, gekk snarla í stórum gný Þundar; þreklundaðr Þórolfr fell. Jǫrð grœr of ágæt*um* barma mínum nær Vínu — þat es helnauð —, en vér verðum hylja harm.

> The killer of an earl [= Þórólfr], he who feared nothing, advanced keenly in the great clash of Þundr <= Óðinn> [BATTLE]; strong-minded Þórólfr fell. The earth grows over my noble brother near Vína — that is deadly sorrow — but we [I] must conceal grief.

Aside from the two kennings of the first *helmingr*, the remainder of the stanza expresses a deep sense of loss, intensified by the parenthetic 'helnauð es þat' [that is deadly sorrow], as well as the speaker's admission that convention requires him to suppress his grief.[44]

The poetry attributed to Egill Skalla-Grímsson, which, if mostly authentic, belongs to the tenth century, displays an enormous range of representations of inner states, from sardonic hatred of his enemies, King Eiríkr blóðøx [Bloodaxe] Haraldsson and his queen Gunnhildr, to whimsical commentary on his own head, saved from being lost at Eiríkr's court at York, to gratitude to his friend and patron Arinbjǫrn Þórisson, to self-pity and lamentation for the

[43] I follow *ÍF* 8, p. 210 n. and the edition by Edith Marold for *SkP* V, in understanding 'that affliction of fire', not as a kenning, but as a direct expression of the visceral effect of the speaker's sexual attraction to the object of his gaze. Some commentators (Sophus Bugge, 'Om Versene i Kormaks Saga' *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (1889), 1–88, at p. 39, followed by Finnur Jónsson in *Skj* BI, have emended the noun *hyrjar* [of fire], which is in the manuscript, to some other noun which could turn this phrase into a standard kenning.

[44] Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*. Islandica 42 (Ithaca and London, 1978), pp. 52–4 provides an excellent close reading of this stanza.

loss of two of his sons in *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons]. A matching range of stylistic resources makes Egill's oeuvre stand out amidst all the poetry recorded in sagas of Icelanders.[45] The work as a whole is unique for its richly inventive kennings, frequently extended metaphorically using congruent images that Snorri Sturluson termed *nýgervingar* [new creations][46] as well as its mastery of a style that is often plain but sometimes trenchantly ironic. While it is likely that the three long poems, *Hǫfuðlausn* [Head-ransom], *Sonatorrek* [Hard Loss of Sons] and *Arinbjarnarkviða* [Poem about Arinbjǫrn], which are inserted into the text of *Egils saga* by later editors, were not originally part of the saga prosimetrum,[47] it is not necessary to doubt their ascription to Egill Skalla-Grímsson, as some scholars have done.[48] Whether they are the work of this man or not, two of them, *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, clearly display that interest in the inner life of the mind and the emotions that came to characterise much of the poetry recorded in sagas of Icelanders.

Several stanzas in the early part of *Gísla saga* provide further examples of how complex inner states could be expressed using the stylistic resources of skaldic diction.[49] There are telling examples in the stanzas *Gísl* 6–7 that show Gísli representing his wife Auðr's sorrow at her brother Vésteinn's murder in terms of bold and sustained metaphor, partly in the form of kennings, partly

45 Recent studies on the expression of the emotions in *Egils saga* include chapters 2–3 of Sif Ríkharðsdóttir's *Emotion in Old Norse Literature. Translations, Voices, Contexts*. Studies in Old Norse Literature 1 (Cambridge, 2017) and two articles by Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, 'The Head, the Heart and the Breast: Bodily Conceptions of Emotion and Cognition in Old Norse Skaldic Poetry', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 15 (2019), 29–64 and 'The Language of Feeling in *Njáls saga* and *Egils saga*: Construction of an Emotional Lexis', *Scripta Islandica*, 71 (2020), 9–50.

46 See *SnE* 1998, I, p. 41; *SnE* 2007, p. 7.

47 See the discussion in Chapter 2 and footnote 29 with references there; also the Introduction to the poetry of Egill Skallagrímsson in *SkP* V.

48 Most notably Jón Helgason, 'Hǫfuðlausnarhjal', in Bjarni Guðnason, Halldór Halldórsson and Jónas Kristjánsson (eds), *Einarsbók: Afmæliskveðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969* (Reykjavík, 1969), pp. 156–76.

49 As discussed in Chapter 3, there has been a great deal of debate about the authenticity of the poetry in *Gísla saga*, which is a work usually dated somewhat later (c. 1250) than the other sagas of Icelanders analysed in this chapter. As it seems unlikely (*pace* Klaus Johan Myrvoll, 'The Authenticity of Gísli's Verse', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 119 (2020), 220–57) that most of the stanzas are attributable to the historical Gísli, they must be seen as the work of one or more later poets. Their later dating does not invalidate my argument that they display resources of poetic diction relating to the expression of the inner life, but they do not then provide examples of such practices from very early in the development of the saga *prosimetrum*, as do *Egils saga* and *Kormáks saga*, among others.

in direct statements that combine images of physicality and abstraction, as when, in *Gísl* 7/3–4, Gísli describes Auðr's sorrow as a 'hlátrbann' [laughter-prohibition] that makes it rain nuts (*hyljar fylvingum*) onto the woman's lap (*í kné svanna*). In the second half of the same stanza the unstated equivalence between nuts and tears is confirmed through an extension of that metaphorical equation in a *nýgerving* [new creation], when the speaker states (ll. 5, 7, 8) that his tearful wife 'gathers nuts from her hazelwood of sight' (*less hnetr af sjónhesli* sínu*).

If the interest in depicting the inner lives of characters in sagas of Icelanders through poetry was initially a product of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, as we must conclude if we regard the poetry of sagas like *Kormáks saga* and *Egils saga* as, in the main, a product of that time, it must have dovetailed with the interests and tastes of those compilers and poets of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries who started to assemble the poetry of two hundred years earlier, which they could only have known through oral transmission, in prosimetrical compilations that became the written sagas of which we have record in manuscript form. In a parallel and possibly related development, Icelandic scholars in this same period were beginning to produce treatises that gave an account of the old practices of the chief poets (*hǫfuðskáld*) and to record some of the newer developments in poetic diction that had taken place subsequently, some of which, like woman-kennings incorporating goddess-names, had become important to the developing semiotics of the *prosimetrum* in sagas of Icelanders.

7

New Emphases in Late Sagas of Icelanders

Changes in Literary Taste

Of the approximately forty extant sagas of Icelanders that contain poetry, ten sagas and two short tales from the period after c. 1270–80 combine verse and prose, ranging from a few stanzas in a single section of their texts to a considerable number distributed throughout the *prosimetrum*. In alphabetical order, and with the number of stanzas given in parentheses, these are: *Bárðar saga* (6), *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar* (3), *Flóamanna saga* (3), *Grettis saga* (73), *Harðar saga* (19), *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* (15), *Króka-Refs saga* (3), *Njáls saga* (64), *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr* (16), *Svarfdœla saga* (17), *Víglundar saga* (24) and *Þórðar saga hreðu* (12). There are also four late sagas that contain no poetry, to be discussed in Chapter 8: *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Fljótsdœla saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Þorskfirðinga saga*, also called *Gull-Þóris saga*.

By any measure the presence of poetry in this group of sagas is significant. Yet, in consequence of the general disregard scholars have shown for sagas of Icelanders that probably date from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the poetry in late sagas, with a few notable exceptions, such as that in *Njáls saga* and *Grettis saga*, has escaped the attention of literary scholars almost completely. This is regrettable, as the poetry in these sagas shows some very interesting new characteristics that distinguish it from the verse cited in earlier sagas and in some cases departs from the usual prosimetrical relationships between verse and prose established in earlier works.

Among other new developments post-1270/80 we may note: a renaissance of the *prosimetrum* form compared to its use in sagas from the mid-thirteenth century, with poetry attributed to major characters at points of high personal emotion in the saga narrative (a phenomenon that was suggested in Chapter 1 may have been in partial decline in the period before c. 1280); an observable increase in the amount of poetry attributed to female characters, suggesting a link with the increasing popularity of the romance in this period; evidence, linguistic and metrical, that much of this poetry was composed by the authors

of the sagas themselves or by poets of roughly the same period; and links with the emerging *ríma* genre.[1]

There is also a pronounced interest in the supernatural world, including the experience of dreams in some sagas of the group, with poetry being frequently attributed to paranormal beings, *draugar* [revenants], fetches and other ghosts. This interest appears in *Bárðar saga*, *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Grettis saga* (particularly in the prose text), *Njáls saga* and *Svarfdœla saga*, as well as in *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr*, and coincides with a similar interest in the supernatural in contemporary sagas, which manifests itself in an outburst of poetry attributed to a range of individuals, who dream foreboding dreams, suffer visions in which unknown and unnamed beings appear to them and recite dark and cryptic poetry. In *Sturlunga saga* this poetic activity is particularly associated with the lead-up to the battle of Örlygsstaðir, which took place in 1238,[2] though it is possible, as Guðrún Nordal has argued,[3] that the poetry associated there with that calamitous event may have been among material added to *Sturlunga saga* in the fourteenth century.

Assessments of the literary tastes of Icelanders in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries are largely inferential because there is an absence of direct evidence for the activities of literary production and reception.[4] However, inferentially tastes seem to have broadened at this time to include supernatural and fantastic elements beyond what were already present in *Íslendingasögur* of an earlier date.[5] The late sagas of Icelanders would have

1 The *ríma* (plural *rímur*) was a new narrative poetic genre that first emerges in Iceland in the fourteenth century and continued in popularity until the late nineteenth century. The connection between late sagas of Icelanders and the *ríma* genre is not discussed in this book for lack of space, although such connections are important, particularly on the level of plot and poetic diction.

2 In his edition of *Svarfdœla saga* (*ÍF* 9, p. xci), as discussed in Chapter 4, Jónas Kristjánsson makes a comparison between some of the poetry there and that recorded in *Sturlunga saga* as associated with the battle of Örlyggsstaðir, and suggests that the spate of such poetry in Iceland around 1238 may have influenced whoever composed the poetry attributed to the revenant Klaufi in *Svarfdœla saga*.

3 'Rewriting History: The Fourteenth-Century Versions of *Sturlunga saga*', in Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge (eds), *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*. The Viking Collection 18 (Odense, 2010), pp. 175–90 at p. 184.

4 See the review of the evidence by Lars Lönnroth, 'Sponsors, Writers and Readers of Early Norse Literature', in his *The Academy of Odin. Selected Papers on Old Norse Literature* (Odense, 2011), pp. 25–36.

5 It is clear that the paranormal dimension to human experience was important to Icelandic saga-writers from much earlier than c. 1280, as has been increasingly recognised among saga scholars, but it seems to have become of even greater

been in active competition for popularity among patrons and audiences with other sub-genres, notably *fornaldarsögur* and romances. It may then be that the increased use of poetry to enhance the complexity of character portraits in these sagas was in part to keep in step with the increased presence of poetry observable in later versions of *fornaldarsögur* such as *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* and to outperform both translated and indigenous romances, which did not use the *prosimetrum* form at all. Romantic sagas such as *Víglundar saga* could then be seen to surpass indigenous romances in literary excellence by enhancing their protagonists' profession of love for the object of their affections in a series of striking skaldic stanzas.[6]

The changing content of manuscript compilations of Icelandic sagas according to their date provides important empirical evidence of contemporary Icelandic tastes for different saga sub-genres, as between sagas of Icelanders, *fornaldarsögur* and translated or indigenous romances. There are very few existing manuscripts of individual sagas of Icelanders that date from before the end of the thirteenth century, and many of these are fragments, so it is hard to know what company with other sub-genres these early texts were keeping, if any. Most extant medieval witnesses to the sub-genre are from the fourteenth century or later. However, within the two centuries between c. 1300 and c. 1500 there is an observable increase in the generic diversity of manuscript compilations as demonstrated by their contents and this suggests a corresponding diversification of literary taste that crossed sub-generic boundaries among both patrons and audiences.

Möðruvallabók [The Book of Möðruvellir] (AM 132 fol (M)) of c. 1320–70 is the earliest surviving compilation to consist exclusively of sagas of Icelanders. It contains ten sagas of Icelanders and two *þættir*, and was intended to include a thirteenth item, the now lost **Gauks saga Trandilssonar*.[7] Of the ten sagas in this compilation, only three, *Njáls saga* (with which the manuscript begins), *Finnboga saga ramma* and *Bandamanna saga* can be classified as late compositions. The other seven (*Egils saga*,

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fascination in the later Middle Ages. See, among other treatments, several of the works of Ármann Jakobsson, including his 'History of the Trolls? *Bárðar saga* as an Historical Narrative', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1998), 53–71; Torfi H. Tulinius, trans. Randi Eldevik, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*. The Viking Collection 13 (Odense, 2002); Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Realism and the Fantastic in the Old Icelandic sagas', *Scandinavian Studies*, 74:4 (2002), 443–54.

6 Exactly the same observation applies to *Friðþjófs saga*, although usually classified as a *fornaldarsaga*, whose poetry is in the simpler metre *fornyrðislag* rather than *dróttkvætt*.

7 See Stefán Karlsson, 'Möðruvallabók', in Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (eds), *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), cols. 426–7.

Kormáks saga, *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Laxdœla saga* and *Fóstbrœðra saga*) all belong to the early or middle group of sagas of Icelanders generally thought to have achieved written form before c. 1270–80. It seems reasonable to infer that whoever commissioned the collection of material for Möðruvallabók was someone whose literary tastes were mainly for sagas of Icelanders that modern scholars have termed 'early' or 'classical', although this person must have made an exception of *Njáls saga*, whose status and popularity would have already been assured by the time Möðruvallabók was being compiled.[8]

Two compilations of sagas of Icelanders, which probably came into being between 1390 and 1425, no longer exist as they once were, but their contents have been reconstructed from extant fragments and later copies.[9] These are the manuscripts termed Vatnshyrna [The Book of Vatnshorn] and Pseudo-Vatnshyrna. The compilation named Vatnshyrna no longer exists. It burned in the Copenhagen fire of 1728, but its contents and those of another compilation, now termed Pseudo-Vatnshyrna, whose contents overlapped with Vatnshyrna to a considerable degree, are thought to have included a mixture of sagas of Icelanders, in which late texts and texts with supernatural themes were prominent. Vatnshyrna's contents are thought to have been: *Bárðar saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Laxdœla saga*, *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, *Vatnsdœla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, *Króka-Refs saga*, *Stjǫrnu-Odda Draumr*, *Bergbúa þáttr*, *Kumblbúa þáttr* and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*. The commissioner of Vatnshyrna is presumed to have been the wealthy farmer Jón Hákonarson from Víðidalstunga in Húnavatnssýsla. His and his wife's interest in the collection was partly genealogical,[10] but it is obvious that they must also have had a keen taste for the supernatural in an Icelandic setting. Pseudo-Vatnshyrna, another largely lost manuscript, of

8 The plethora of manuscripts of *Njáls saga*, including some that antedate M, like AM 468 4to, of c. 1300–25 and GKS 2870 4to (*Gráskinna*) of c. 1300, bear witness to the extraordinary popularity of *Nj* from the period immediately after its composition and thereafter. Both these early manuscripts contain *Njáls saga* alone, which is not surprising, given that this is the longest of all sagas of Icelanders, and would have required the expenditure of substantial funds, time and labour to inscribe on vellum.

9 See Stefán Karlsson, 'Um Vatnshyrna', *Opuscula* 4, *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana*, 30 (1970), pp. 279–303; John McKinnell, 'The Reconstruction of Pseudo-Vatnshyrna', *Opuscula* 4. *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana*, 30 (1970), pp. 304–38; John McKinnell, 'Vatnshyrna', in Philip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (eds), *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), cols. 689–90.

10 Its texts of *Flóamanna saga* and *Þórðar saga* trace genealogies down to Jón and his wife Ingileif Árnadóttir; cf. *ÍF* 14, pp. l–li.

which three fragments still survive, contained a similar mix of sagas, many of them late, many with paranormal subjects.[11]

Other manuscript compilations from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reveal late medieval Icelanders' tastes for mixes of saga sub-genres or for particular groups of sagas with similar themes. For example, AM 556 a 4to of c. 1400–1500 contains the three outlaw sagas, *Gísla saga*, *Grettis saga* (together with the obscene rhythmical composition *Grettisfærsla*)[12] and *Harðar saga*, together with fragments of a romance, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*. Several significant compilations include a mixture of sagas of Icelanders, *fornaldarsögur* and romances. An example is the fifteenth-century manuscript AM 471 4to (c. 1450–1500),[13] which begins with three late sagas of Icelanders, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Króka-Refs saga* and *Kjalnesinga saga*, followed by three *fornaldarsögur* of the Hrafnistumenn, Ketill hœngr, Grímr loðinkinni and Qrvar-Oddr,[14] and concluding with the *riddarasaga Viktors saga ok Blávus*.

Adding Female Interest

If the company sagas keep in manuscript compilations tells us something about late medieval Icelanders' literary interests, textual analysis of these sagas for characteristic differences from earlier sagas of Icelanders reveals several ways in which they were shaped in order to appeal to changing consumer taste. One important area of consumer demand that was catered to in the later Middle Ages by the many translated and indigenous romances,

11 Contents included the Melabók text of *Landnámabók*, *Vatnsdœla saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Bárðar saga*, *Þórðar saga hreðu*, *Bergbúa þáttr*, *Kumblbúa þáttr*, *Draumr Þórsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Gísla saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, and *Harðar saga*, the last-named probably a later addition.

12 *Grettisfærsla* [The Moving of Grettir] is the title of a scurrilous poem supposedly composed by the farmers of Ísafjörður after they had captured the outlawed Grettir and could not decide what to do with him (ch. 52, *ÍF* 7, p. 168 and n. 2; cf. Chapter 3 above, n. 59). The only text is in AM 556 a 4to, right after *Grettis saga*, but someone has all but scraped it off the vellum, doubtless disturbed by its obscenity. See Kate Heslop, '*Grettisfærsla*: The Handing on of Grettir', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 30 (2006), 65–94 and her edition in *SkP* V.

13 For a description of this manuscript, see the Introduction to *SkP* VIII (2017), p. lxvii.

14 The Hrafnistumenn were the partly legendary, partly historical descendants of the Norwegian Ketill hœngr [Salmon] from Hrafnista (Ramsta), an island off the coast of Namdalen in Norway. Among them were Ketill, his son Grímr and Qrvar-Oddr, all subjects of *fornaldarsögur*, as well as being the maternal ancestors of Egill Skallagrímsson.

and to a lesser degree, by some *fornaldarsögur* like *Friðþjófs saga*,[15] arguably came from the female half of the Icelandic population. Although direct evidence for female influence on the production of saga texts is limited, women would have been among the audiences who listened to sagas being read aloud in the evenings, and some women may have been in a position to influence the choice of saga subjects performed and, indirectly, the way in which such subjects were handled by their authors.[16]

What is certain is that many romances and some *fornaldarsögur* give their female characters a much more prominent role in their narratives than do many sagas of Icelanders that are likely to have been composed before 1270–80. However, as we noted in Chapter 6, authors of sagas of Icelanders from the early and middle periods were already exploring the female psyche through an expanded poetic discourse, even though the stanzas in which it was expressed were there attributed to male characters almost exclusively. A further step was to give some female characters actual speaking roles through which they could express themselves in stanzas ranging from *fornyrðislag* and other eddic metres to the complexities of *dróttkvætt* and *hrynhent*. Doubtless, the actual composers of such *lausavísur* remained male, but in terms of the literary fictions of these sagas, female characters were given a voice, a poetic voice in which they could compete for Icelandic audiences' attention with the poetry-deficient heroines of romances.

It would be unwise to exaggerate the extent to which female characters in late sagas of Icelanders gained their poetic voice. It was a limited extension, which is documented below, and it may have been deliberately restricted by the saga authors' desire not to over-complicate their narratives with difficult poetry, which would probably have seemed implausible to medieval audiences if put into the mouths of female characters. There is some evidence that authors often chose to give female characters simpler metrical forms or plain *dróttkvætt* stanzas with few kennings and other stylistic complexities.[17] Of the sixteen examples of women's poetry discussed below, two (*Bárð* 1 and

15 Even though the main theme of *Friðþjófs saga* is the hero's quest for his beloved, Ingibjǫrg, and his love for her, none of the poetry is attributed to her, so our view of their romance is an exclusively masculine one.

16 Growing evidence about the circumstances in which manuscript compilations were produced during the fourteenth century, in both religious houses and secular farms, supports this hypothesis; see Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Saints and Sinners. Aspects of the Production and Use of Manuscripts in Iceland in the Period 1300–1600', in Kate Heslop and Jürg Glauser (eds), *RE:writing. Medial Perspectives on Textual Culture in the Icelandic Middle Ages* (Zürich, 2018), pp. 181–94.

17 Whoever composed the poetry attributed to Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir in *Víglundar saga* certainly followed such a plan. See in particular *Vígl* 2 and 8 and Notes to those stanzas in Klaus Johan Myrvoll's edition of *Vígl* in *SkP* V.

Harð 6) are in *fornyrðislag*, while several others, though in *dróttkvætt*, have relatively plain diction and straightforward word order.[18]

By developing some female characters as composers and speakers of poetry, authors of late sagas of Icelanders took the opportunity to present women as much more complex human beings than the somewhat stereotyped heroines of many *riddarasögur*. In addition, they were able to go beyond the conventions of female poetic discourse apparent from *fornaldarsögur* and elsewhere, which presented female characters, often in the shape of troll-women or sorceresses, as particularly associated with a restricted range of poetic genres: prophecy, curses and minor forms of satire or invective.[19] By contrast, many of the female characters who speak poetry in late sagas of Icelanders are female members of one or other of the Icelandic families central to the saga narratives. Their poetic discourse therefore belongs to the same discursive plane as that of the main story-line.

There are sixteen *lausavísur* attributed to female speakers in late sagas of Icelanders, all but two of them said to be the compositions of central characters in their sagas.[20] These are *Bárð* 1–2, attributed to Helga, daughter of Bárðr Snæfellsáss, unhappy at being in Greenland far from her home on Snæfellsnes (*Bárð* 1) and at being unwillingly removed from her lover Miðfjarðar-Skeggi (*Bárð* 2); *Gr* 72, a stanza spoken by Grettir Ásmundarson's mother Ásdís in defiance of her son's killer Þorbjǫrn ǫngull [Fish-hook], who has insulted her and brandished Grettir's decapitated head in front of her; *Harð* 2, a bitter complaint by Signý, Hǫrðr Grímkelsson's mother, that the clumsy boy has broken her necklace;[21] *Harð* 6 and 18, two stanzas by Hǫrðr's sister Þorbjǫrg, vowing revenge for her brother; *Nj* 1–3, three stanzas

18 An exception is *Harð* 18, which is a very artful stanza in the variant of *dróttkvætt* termed *dunhent* [echoing rhymed]; cf. SnSt *Ht* 24[III].

19 The connection between female speakers of poetry and the mode of prophecy is widespread in both eddic poetry and *fornaldarsögur*, with *Vǫluspá* being paradigmatic; curses and poetry designed to cause harm to male victims are also plentifully attested in *fornaldarsögur* (e.g. Busla in *Bósa saga*; Feima and Kleima in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*; Forað in *Ketils saga hængs*). Examples of female speakers of curses and invective in sagas of Icelanders include *Nj* 40–1, the two stanzas by Steinunn Refsdóttir directed at the missionary Þangbrandr, and the *kviðlingr* by Þorbjǫrg skáldkona [Poetess] (*Nj* 12), as well as another on a similar subject (sexual jealousy) in *Laxd* 2. Both examples from *Nj* are of poetry belonging to the original form of the saga. In this category also belong the three stanzas spoken by fetches of Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson in *ÞSHDr* (see footnote 18 below). Among the few female speakers of poetry in *fornaldarsögur* who do not belong to the above categories are Hervǫr Angantýsdóttir in *Heiðreks saga* and Áslaug, wife of Ragnarr loðbrók, in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*.

20 The two exceptions are *Bárð* 3–4, threats spoken by a troll-woman named Hetta.

21 A text and translation of this stanza is in Chapter 3.

attributed in some manuscripts to Unnr Marðardóttir in discussion with her father about her reasons for wishing to pursue a divorce from her husband, Hrútr Herjólfsson. Unnr's stanzas, along with many others in the first part of *Njáls saga*, are additional to the original text, and frequently cover the same ground as passages of prose.[22] In this case, however, the stanzas make the married couple's sexual problems more overt and reveal Unnr's sense of shame at having to discuss the matter with her father.

The remaining stanzas spoken by female characters all come from *Víglundar saga*, which, of all the sagas of Icelanders, is the one most obviously influenced by the plots, characters and sentiments of medieval romances. Appropriately, then, the poetry in this saga is mainly about the love that springs up between a young man, Víglundr Þorgrímsson, and a young woman, Ketilríðr Hólmkelsdóttir, whose romance is thwarted by her evil mother and brothers, who are under the malign influence of a sorceress. Predictably, numerous obstacles stand in the lovers' path but are finally overcome to allow a happy ending to the saga. Four *lausavísur* (plus one *helmingr*) are spoken by female characters, the first (*Vígl* 1) by Víglundr's mother Ólǫf, who is also Ketilríðr's foster-mother. Ólǫf has herself been denied the man she loves in her early life, though she later manages to elope with him from Norway to Iceland, where the main story unfolds. Ketilríðr has three *lausavísur* and one half-stanza to herself, in two of which she expresses her longing for Víglundr and her terror of the sea, thinking him drowned. These two stanzas, *Vígl* 2 and 8, are reminiscent of the combined themes of yearning for the beloved and the dangers of sea travel in *Friðþjófs saga*, except that in *Víglundar saga* the speaker is a woman fearful of her lover's fate at sea, while in *Friðþjófs saga* the speaker is a man separated from his beloved by the evil machinations of his male rivals and sent on a dangerous voyage to Orkney.

The innovation of women's poetry in late sagas of Icelanders lies in the fact that it deals with mainstream issues in the lives of saga-age Icelanders, but from a female perspective. This poetry presents some of the fundamental issues in women's lives, expressing the emotions of love, fear, jealousy, homesickness, grief, shame, defiant defence of male kin, whether son or brother, and a resolve to take vengeance for killings within the family. Most such topics are also the subjects of eddic poetry, particularly the sequences of women's laments, such as *Guðrúnarkviða I–III* and *Oddrúnargrátr* among the heroic poems of the Codex Regius collection. However, the differences between the two modes, the one more or less realistic, the other grandly extravagant, grounds the late saga poetry in the imagined world of saga-age

[22] This matter is fully discussed later in the present chapter and in R. D. Fulk's Introduction to his edition of the poetry from *Njáls saga* in *SkP* V and in his Notes to individual stanzas.

Iceland rather than in some heroic court in a vaguely imagined non-Icelandic society far away.[23] The complex metre of the saga stanzas, usually *dróttkvætt*, is a signal to the audience that they should be taken seriously, while the direct expression of the characters' state of mind gives the poetry a clear emotional effectiveness, as in Ketilríðr's first stanza (*Vígl* 2/1–4), supposedly spoken after she has received news that Víglundr may have drowned:

> Eigi má ek á ægi
> ógrátandi líta,
> sízt er málvinir mínir
> fyrir marbakka sukku.
>
> Ek má eigi líta ógrátandi á ægi, sízt er málvinir mínir sukku fyr marbakka.
>
> I am not able to look upon the sea without weeping, since my close friends sank outside the sea-bank.

Changes in the *prosimetrum*: A Different Way to Use Poetry

There are several perceptible differences in the constitution of the *prosimetrum* of late sagas of Icelanders when compared with that of the period before c. 1270–80. Two in particular stand out and suggest that late skaldic poetry was considered more of an ornamental feature of the texts in which it appeared, added to enhance its rhetorical effect, rather than being a vehicle for embedding the discourse of the poetic voices from the past into the saga author's prose narrative.[24]

Verbal Repetition between Verse and Prose

There is often a close integration of the prose and verse texts in late sagas of Icelanders. This is evident in substantial verbal repetition of words and phrases that occur in the prose text immediately before (and sometimes after) the presentation of a stanza. It is notable that usually no new information is

[23] That the two modes could be, and were, compared by people in medieval Iceland is shown by the character Gísli Súrsson's comparison in *Gísl* 12 between his sister's failure to support her consanguine kin and the heroic behaviour attributed to the legendary Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.

[24] Kari Ellen Gade (pers. comm.) has observed that a similar situation exists in the *samtíðarsögur*, and is very much in keeping also with the use of poetry in such a late kings' saga as *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, into which Sturla Þórðarson incorporated his own and his brother's poetry even though there were plenty of eyewitness reports to support the prose text. She refers to this use of poetry as 'authenticating-ornamental'.

vouchsafed to the audience through this process, suggesting that the purpose of the stanza (or stanzas) is to embellish and intensify what has already been stated in the prose. This characteristic also suggests that the prose and poetry may have been composed by one and the same person. Numerous examples of this practice occur across many late sagas, and only a few can be mentioned here.[25]

Examples are plentiful in *Grettis saga*. *Gr* 27 elaborates on a passage in the prose text in which Grettir is reported to have claimed that he would happily take on up to three opponents in a fight but would baulk at more than four:

> Svá hefir Grettir sagt, at hann þóttisk øruggr til vígs við flesta menn, þó at þrír væri saman, en hann myndi eigi flýja fyrir fjórum at óreyndu, en því at eins berjask við fleiri, nema hann ætti hendr sínar at verja, sem segir í þessi vísu:[26]
>
> Grettir has said that he would consider himself undaunted in fighting with most men, even if they were three at once, and he would not flee from four without putting it to the test, but would only fight against more if he had to save his own life, as it says in this stanza:

The stanza that follows this report, which is not actually attributed to Grettir himself,[27] follows the prose text very closely. It provides no new information but embellishes its message with a pair of man-kennings. The stanza begins (lines 1–2) 'Treysti ek mér við Mistar | mótkennanda þrenna' [I trust myself against three proclaimers of the meeting of Mist <valkyrie> [(*lit*. 'meeting-proclaimers of Mist') BATTLE > WARRIORS]], while the second *helmingr* starts (lines 5–6) 'Vil ek ei fleiri en fjórum | fársætöndum mæta' [I am unwilling to meet more than four harm-causers [WARRIORS]]. Neither the prose nor the stanza has any new narrative function apart from the emphasis they lay on Grettir's shrewdness in judging when to refrain from fighting multiple opponents, an ironically placed example of which occupies the earlier part of the chapter in which this passage occurs, when Grettir backs off from fighting reinforcements sent to the aid of a party of six exhausted and

25 Other examples of this phenomenon include the verse and prose contexts of *Harð* 1–4; *Krók* 3; *Vígl* 5, 7, 14; *Nj* 1 and many other of the additional stanzas in *Nj*, some of which are discussed further below.

26 Chapter 31, *ÍF* 7, p. 107.

27 Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 219–20 analyses this same incident but claims that the stanza is attributed to Grettir, which is unlikely to be the implication of 'sem segir í þessi vísu' [as it says in this stanza]. Her contention that the stanza is represented as an authoritative opinion of Grettir himself is consequently dubitable.

wounded men who have just returned from taking part in the famous Battle on the Heath.

The verbal repetition of words and phrases from prose to poetry in order to give weight to an incident in the narrative can be clearly seen in Chapter 47 of *Grettis saga*, at the point when Grettir returns to Iceland to learn that in his absence his brother has been killed, his father had died, and he himself has been declared an outlaw. The prose immediately preceding *Gr* 30 tells:

> Þessi tíðendi kómu ǫll senn til Grettis, þat fyrst, at faðir hans var andaðr, annat þat, at bróðir hans var veginn, þat þriðja, at hann var sekr gǫrr um allt landit. Þá kvað Grettir vísu þessa:[28]
>
> All this news came to Grettir at the same time, firstly that his father was dead, secondly that his brother was slain, and thirdly that he had been made an outlaw throughout the whole country. Then Grettir spoke this stanza:

Several of the key phrases in the prose text correspond to passages in the stanza's first *helmingr* and are italicised here:

> *Alt kom senn* at svinnum,
> *sekt mín*, bragar tini;
> *föður* skal drengr *af dauða*
> drjúghljóðr *ok svá bróður*.

> Sekt mín kom alt senn at svinnum tíni bragar; drengr skal drjúghljóðr af dauða föður, ok svá bróður.
>
> My outlawry came all at once upon the wise proclaimer of poetry [POET = me, Grettir]; a man must be long silent about his father's death, and his brother's too.

The factual statement of the prose appears here as two separate poetic statements with rather different associations, yet they still retain much of the information and vocabulary of the prose text. In the first clause Grettir turns the immediate focus upon himself (*sekt mín*) and his profession of poetry (he is a *wise* proclaimer of poetry); in the second the prose text's enumeration of the deaths of his father and brother appears as a semi-proverbial gnomic statement about how a man should bear grief silently.[29]

Close correspondence between prose and poetry in *Grettis saga* and elsewhere can sometimes be used for comic effect. In Chapter 40 of the saga

[28] Chapter 47, *ÍF* 7, p. 147.

[29] There are many instances in *Grettis saga* in which the saga author (who may also be the composer of much of the poetry), through his character of Grettir, speaks in aphorisms or proverbial utterances.

Grettir fights and kills a berserk named Snækollr [Snow-head]. The prose text gives a detailed description of the grotesque nature of their encounter: when the berserk bites the edge of his shield, as berserks are wont to do in saga literature, Grettir kicks so hard with his foot that the shield is forced into the man's mouth, tearing his jaws apart and causing his lower jaw to fall onto his chest. Grettir then pulls the berserk off his horse and decapitates him. The stanza (*Gr* 29) that follows this description pushes the grotesquerie further towards a comic edge by using a sequence of playful and unprecedented kennings for the various affected parts of the berserk's body: Grettir kicks with 'þyrnir ökla' [the thorn of the ankle [FOOT]], and the shield enters Snækollr's 'port snæðungs' [gateway of food [MOUTH]], so that 'toptir tanngarðs' [the plots of the tooth-wall [JAWS]] split and the jaws burst apart onto the chest ('kjálkar rifnuðu á bringu'), the last phrase echoing the prose text's 'en kjálkarnir hljópu ofan á bringuna' [and the jaws fell down onto the chest].

The verbal closeness between prose and verse in late sagas of Icelanders raises the question of whether both prose and poetry were the work of one person, who created both, or were the outcome of a collaboration between two or more artists, who were working closely together or within a short time of one another. Although it is probably not possible to determine all the circumstances of composition of such a complex work as *Grettis saga*, many editors of late sagas have voiced the opinion that single authorship of both prose and poetry was likely at least for some of the poetry within them, though probably not for all.[30] In some cases, a quirk of the poetry within a saga adds to the likelihood that it was all composed by one and the same person. In *Harðar saga*, for example, as noted in Chapter 3, there are several stanzas composed in a mixture of *dróttkvætt* and *hrynhent* metre, with an admixture of lines that are hypermetrical or do not scan.[31] *Hrynhent* [flowing rhymed] was a very popular metre in the fourteenth century, especially for poetry on religious subjects, so it is possible that whoever composed the *dróttkvætt* stanzas for *Harð* was more used to composing in *hrynhent* and struggled to keep that metre out of the stanzas that were largely in *dróttkvætt*.

Recent and ongoing research is shining a light on the early transmission of manuscripts of *Njáls saga* and on the nature of the interrelationship of its

30 Cf. Guðni Jónsson in *ÍF* 7, pp. xli–xlii (*Grettis saga*); Hallvard Magerøy (ed.), *Bandamanna saga*, Introduction and Notes trans. Peter Foote and Sue Margeson (University College London, 1981), pp. l–liii; *ÍF* 14, p. xxv (*Víglundar saga*) and pp. liii–liv (*Þórðar saga*) and the editions of the following sagas in *SkP* V: *Harðar saga*; *Króka-Refs saga*; *Njáls saga*; *Víglundar saga*; *Þórðar saga*.

31 See the Introduction to *Harðar saga* in *SkP* V and the Notes there to *Harð* 2, 4, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

prose and poetry.[32] Of the sixty-four examples of poetry in the saga,[33] thirty stanzas are additions to the text in some, but by no means all, manuscripts. They function as additions to or substitutes for passages of prose or as marginal additions. As R. D. Fulk, the latest editor of the poetry in *Njáls saga* has indicated, these thirty additional stanzas were probably added to manuscripts of the saga within a short time of its original composition c. 1280.[34] They are presented as the utterances of some of the major characters, including Unnr Marðardóttir, Gunnarr Hámundarson, Skarpheðinn Njálsson and Sigmundr Lambason, and are confined to the first half of the saga up to the end of Chapter 99, immediately before the topic of the advent of Christianity to Iceland is introduced. As Fulk has argued (*loc. cit.*), 'the close resemblance between certain of the stanzas and the prose that they replace or supplement … is strong evidence that they were composed later than the prose'.

Like the stanzas from *Grettis saga* analysed above, the additional stanzas in *Njáls saga* intensify the actions or feelings of the saga protagonists without adding anything new to the narrative and follow the wording of the prose closely, but with suitable embellishments. A good example is *Nj* 26, Gunnarr's reaction to his wife Hallgerðr's refusal to lend him a lock of her hair to replace his broken bowstring, in which the stanza offers an eight-line expansion on a sentence in the prose text. In another case, the *taðskegglingar* [little dung beards] episode, three additional stanzas (*Nj* 15–17) expand the prose text's tantalising reference to scandalous poetry as the cause of a killing, from which, however, it does not quote. The three stanzas attempt rather unsuccessfully to satisfy the audience's presumed curiosity about what the scandalous poetry actually said. Fulk has speculated that the original relative lack of poetry in the first part of the saga may have been considered a literary defect by some among the saga's early audiences, leading redactors of some manuscripts to compose additional stanzas or to commission others to do so.

Commentary by Saga Characters on Poetry within the Saga

The evidence assembled so far about the nature of the *prosimetrum* in late sagas of Icelanders indicates that there was a tendency on the part of saga authors or redactors to effect a convergence between prose and poetry at the

32 See Emily Lethbridge and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (eds), *New Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njáls saga. The historia mutila of Njála*. Northern Medieval World (Kalamazoo, MI, 2018).

33 Comprising fifty-one *lausavísur*, two *kviðlingar* or ditties and the *fornyrðislag* poem *Darraðarljóð* (eleven stanzas).

34 See Fulk's Introduction to his edition of poetry from *Njáls saga* in *SkP* V.

level of the saga narrative rather than to follow an impulse to keep the two media of communication distinct. In some cases this convergence allows a character within the prose narrative to react to and comment on the poetry spoken by another character in the main story, thus stepping momentarily out of the role of character and into that of commentator. Such a role-change has the effect of placing both prose and poetry on the same discourse level within the narrative, at least temporarily. It also sometimes allows the saga narrative to offer oblique commentary to its audience on the character of the poetry itself, drawing attention to its meaning or to its cleverness or to a *double entendre*.[35]

A good example of this technique is the prose text of *Grettis saga* surrounding *Gr* II, together with the stanza itself. In Chapter 16 of the saga Grettir sets out with a group of men for an assembly meeting, but on the way, out of sight of his companions, he kills a farmhand named Skeggi with his axe after they have quarrelled briefly over a knapsack. When Grettir catches up with the rest of the party, they ask him what he knows about Skeggi, and he replies with *Gr* II, a stanza in which he uses kennings for an axe personified as a troll-woman to admit that an axe killed Skeggi and that he, Grettir, was present at their encounter. If the stanza was interpreted by someone who understood the imagery of skaldic poetry, in which axe-kennings often use base-words for troll-women, this information could constitute an admission of Grettir's guilt in Skeggi's murder. Most of Grettir's companions take the axe-personification literally, however, according to the prose straight after the stanza is cited:[36] 'Þá hljópu fylgðarmenn Þorkels upp ok sǫgðu ekki mundu troll hafa tekit manninn um ljósan dag' [Then Þorkell's companions ran up and said that trolls would not have taken the man in broad daylight]. After a little hesitation their *goði*, Þorkell krafla [Scrabbler], works out what the stanza means, that Grettir has killed Skeggi with his axe, and, because Skeggi was in Þorkell's charge, insists on taking the matter to the assembly, where Grettir is duly declared an outlaw.[37]

35 As Kari Ellen Gade has pointed out (pers. comm.) there are examples of interaction between characters, particularly on the topic of poetry, in kings' sagas, often for comic effect: e.g. when King Haraldr harðráði provides the last word in Þorm Lv 24/8^{I} (*svíða* [cause pain]); in Máni Lv 3^{II} when the audience repeats the last line for their own amusement (*ÍF* 30, p. 131), and in ESk Lv 6^{II} (*ÍF* 24, pp. 224–5), when King Eysteinn Haraldsson and his retainers are charged with memorising a stanza and can remember only the first and last lines.

36 Chapter 16, *ÍF* 7, p. 47.

37 Another instance in *Grettis saga* where ordinary people fail to understand skaldic poetry is Chapter 17, where the sailors on board a ship are unable to understand the hidden meaning of a stanza (*Gr* 14) the captain has asked Grettir to compose about him that purports to present him in a bad light while actually praising him. In this case modern scholars have not fared any better than the sailors, and no one has convincingly explained how this stanza's *double entendre* works.

There is a superficial similarity between this situation and the well-known stanza (*Gísl* II) that Gísli Súrsson utters in *Gísla saga*, in which he admits his guilt as the killer of Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson in a cryptic stanza overheard and eventually understood by his sister Þórdís. In both cases a man admits his role as another man's killer in a skaldic stanza, which is later understood as a confession of guilt by a third character, but the difference between the two sagas is that the process of interpretation is not revealed in *Gísla saga* through the words of a character in the narrative but rather at the level of an authorial or editorial comment. In the prose text preceding *Gísl* II, the prose text reads:[38] 'Gísli kvað þá vísu, er æva skyldi' [Gísli then recited the stanza, which never should have been [recited]]. This is the wording of AM 556 a 4to, while other manuscripts have a slightly different text. The comment may originally have been editorial rather than authorial (although such a distinction is hard to establish), but whatever its origin, it remains at the impersonal narratorial level. When later Þórdís tells her husband Bǫrkr about Gísli's stanza and its meaning, this is also initially presented at the level of report.[39]

There are a number of examples in *Grettis saga* in which characters in the narrative react to one another's poetry. An extended use of this technique appears in the light-hearted *Söðulkollavísur* [Saddle-head verses] (*Gr* 31–7),[40] an episode in which Grettir takes a farmer's horse, Söðulkolla, without permission because he wants to get to his destination in a hurry, while the farmer pursues him to recover it. Each man composes stanzas along the way and recites them to those they meet. Grettir's stanzas drop clues to his adversary about his identity and his intent, though the farmer fails to understand them, and the sequence concludes with the two men meeting and reciting verses as humorous entertainment (*gaman mikit*).

Another instance of convergence between the prose narrative and its characters' poetry occurs in Chapter 21 of *Víglundar saga*, in which Víglundr, on returning to Iceland and seeing the glacier Snæfellsjökull from the sea, is reminded of his love for Ketilríðr. He composes a stanza (*Vígl* II) about his feelings for her, addressed to his brother, Trausti, in which both the first and the last word of the stanza is a form of her name, Ketilríðr. In the immediately ensuing prose Trausti is made to comment:[41] '"Mikit er nú um," segir Trausti, "er þú nefnir hana bæði í niðurlagi ok upphafi vísu þinnar"' ['It is now remarkable', says Trausti, 'that you name her both in the end and the beginning of your stanza']. Such commentary has the effect of drawing the audience's attention to the cleverness of the stanza's style more than its

38 Chapter 18, *ÍF* 6, p. 58.
39 Chapter 19, *ÍF* 6, p. 61.
40 Chapter 47, *ÍF* 7, pp. 148–52.
41 Chapter 21, *ÍF* 14, p. 106.

content, and seems to implicate the voice of the stanza's composer rather than that of the saga-age character through which it is uttered.

A further example of the authorial use of characters in the saga as commentators on its poetry occurs in Chapter 8 of the Möðruvallabók version of *Bandamanna saga*. Here the character Egill Skúlason, who is a great-grandson and namesake of the poet Egill Skalla-Grímsson, comments on a stanza (*Band* 3) composed by Ófeigr Skíðason and compliments him on his poetry, saying:[42] 'ok ertu skáld gott' [and you are a good poet]. The stanza, which is in *dróttkvætt*, contains several kennings employing mythological allusions, one at least of an unusual kind.[43] The saga author or redactor here appears to be having a joke with the audience, who will have recognised that Egill Skúlason was a member of the Mýramenn clan, and so a descendant of a family of poets, though he himself cuts a rather miserable figure among the confederates of *Bandamanna saga*.

Causing characters in the narrative to react to poetry cited in the *prosimetrum* has the dual effect of obliterating the distance between two narrative levels and effectively denying the poetry the status of being a voice from the past, while highlighting the cleverness of the stanzas' rhetoric. Unsurprisingly then, it is observable that much of the poetry in late sagas of Icelanders is self-consciously cerebral, drawing attention to itself on account of the various metrical and rhetorical forms it employs. Some late sagas are more obviously self-conscious than others, with the poetry of *Grettis saga* perhaps being at the most extreme end of the range. Whoever composed the poetry of Grettir, whether one man or more, made great use of the rhetorical device of *ofljóst* [excessively clear], a form of word-play involving the use of homonyms and synonyms, especially on the forms of personal names.[44] Several of these involve puns on Grettir's own name, which, as a simplex means 'grimacer', but functions as a snake-*heiti* in late skaldic poetry (cf. *Harð* 14/8; Þul *Orma* 2/3[III]) and in *rímur*. The character Grettir alludes to this snake-*heiti* four times (*Gr* 26/8, 34/2–3, 42/5–6, 59/7) in kennings for himself and it is used once (*Gr* 43/5–6) in the same way by another character, Hallmundr. There are several other proper names subject to *ofljóst* punning in

42 Chapter 8, *ÍF* 7, p. 333.

43 See below and my edition of the poetry from *Band* in *SkP* V and Note [All] to *Band* 3 there.

44 *Ofljóst* was by no means confined to late sagas. It is found in a number of earlier works, especially in connection with personal names and place names; e.g. in *Egils saga*, where there is play on the name Arinbjǫrn in several places (*Eg* 58/6, 112/7–8, 113/5). Haukr Valdísarson uses the compound *snægrund* [snow-ground] for *Ísland* [Iceland] twice (3/2 and 17/4) in his *Íslendingadrápa*[IV], generally dated to the late twelfth century. On *ofljóst* in sagas of Icelanders, see further the section on poetic style in the Introduction to *SkP* V.

Grettis saga, especially in *Gr* 38, on the killing of Grettir's enemy Þorbjǫrn øxnamegin [Oxen's Might] and in the two *Ævikviður* (*Gr* 22–4, 39–42).[45]

Some of the kennings and other figures of the poetry in late sagas of Icelanders suggest that their creators might have been influenced by one or other of the handbooks on poetics that had been written in Iceland in the course of the thirteenth century. An exotic kenning such as 'höldr tandrauða Nílsanda' [freeholder of fire-red sands of the Nile [GOLD > MAN]] in *Harð* 15/2–3 suggests a poet straining to create a gold-kenning on the basis of those that refer to gold more commonly as the fire or light of the River Rhine, basing themselves on an allusion to the legendary hoard of the Niflungar.[46] Similarly, in *Harð* 14/5–6, 8 two elaborate but unusual kennings for summer and winter perhaps indicate that whoever composed them had been influenced by Snorri Sturluson's prescription in *Skáldskaparmál* that winter should be called the killer of snakes (*bani orma*) and summer their comfort (*líkn ormanna*).[47]

Unusual kennings in late sagas that refer to Old Norse myths may also suggest composition by poets well versed in Icelandic poetic handbooks. Kennings in two *dróttkvætt* stanzas of *Bandamanna saga* are of this kind. In *Band* 3/6 the gold-kenning 'hlátr Iðja' [the laughter of Iði <giant>] pushes the boundary of the type of gold-kenning that alludes to a myth mentioned in *Skáldskaparmál*.[48] This myth purports to explain why gold can be called the speech or talk (but not the laughter) of giants. The second kenning (*Band* 5/1–2) is very plausibly based on a knowledge of *Skáldskaparmál*, as Roberta Frank was the first to propose.[49] It refers to poetry as 'sáttir Áms ok Austra' [the reconciliation of Ámr <giant> and Austri <dwarf>]. This kenning, whose form and content are unprecedented in the skaldic corpus, is likely to be a direct allusion to Snorri's account of how the giant Suttungr obtained the mead of poetry from two dwarfs as compensation for their killing of his

45 *Grettis saga* also furnishes an example of two half-stanzas (*Gr* 36–7) in the *dróttkvætt* variant *greppaminni* [poets' reminder], which is elsewhere found in poetic treatises (SnSt *Ht* 40^{III}; RvHbreiðm *Hl* 45–6^{III} and Anon (*FoGT*) 46–7^{III}) as well as in Anon *Lil* 62^{VII}.

46 See *Meissner* 225.

47 *SnE* 1998, I, pp. 39–40.

48 *SnE* 1998, I, p. 3; *Meissner* 227. According to Snorri, a giant named Ǫlvaldi wanted to divide his inheritance equally between his three sons, one of whom was named Iði, so he got each of them to take equal mouthfuls of his gold.

49 Roberta Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', in Ursula Dronke, Guðrún Helgadóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (eds), *Specvlvm Norroenvm. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre* (Odense, 1981), pp. 155–79 at p. 166.

father Gillingr: 'ok þat verðr at sætt með þeim' [and that [the mead of poetry] becomes the basis of settlement between them].[50]

Instance in which a Poetic Stanza is Completed by the Saga Prose

There is a unique example in a late saga text in which stanzas of *dróttkvætt* poetry are not semantically (in one instance) or semantically and syntactically completed (in another) in the stanzas themselves, but rely on the immediately following prose to complete their message in such a way that the poetic text bleeds into the prose. This phenomenon occurs in *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar* (*ÞSHDr*),[51] a strange short tale that recounts how Þorsteinn is visited in three consecutive dreams by a trio of women, his family fetches, who urge him to kill a slave who, they say, intends to kill him and later does so. Each woman speaks one stanza in the metre *galdralag* [incantations' metre] to Þorsteinn with escalating dramatic tension, and the growing urgency of their messages is conveyed by the saga writer's device of completing the poetry by means of a prose addition, so that the full import of the women's warning becomes inescapable to Þorsteinn. The first woman's stanza (*ÞSHDr* 1) is self-contained both syntactically and semantically, but the second's (*ÞSHDr* 2), while being syntactically complete, makes its second *helmingr*'s threat much more pointed and direct. The stanza is obscure, but seems to conclude with a reference to Þorsteinn, 'sás riðnar blóðs of eldi und lok' [he who causes the fire of blood [SWORD] to be swung at the end]. Immediately after the last line of poetry, which concludes 'und lok riðnar' [[causes to be] swung at the end] the woman adds extrametrically 'ævi þinnar, Þorsteinn' [of your life, Þorsteinn!]. In the third and final stanza (*ÞSHDr* 3) the prose text that follows the stanza's last word, 'tóku' [they [the goddesses of fate] took], is needed to complete the syntax and meaning of the stanza by providing a direct object for the verb, which otherwise does not have one. Again, the prose completion, 'lífit frá þér, Þorsteinn' [[they took] life from you, Þorsteinn], insists directly that the message is personal. Such a binding together of verse and prose, in which the prose is necessary for the syntactic and semantic completion of the utterance as a whole, takes the *prosimetrum* form to an extreme of interdependence. It is hard to avoid concluding that both verse and prose in this text were composed by the same author.[52]

50 *SnE* 1998, I, p. 3.

51 *ÍF* II, pp. 323–6. The three stanzas are on pp. 323, 324 and 325. See also the edition of the poetry by Tarrin Wills in *SkP* V.

52 I am indebted to Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin Wills for their thoughts on this unusual text. Somewhat similar are *Gísl* 3, in which the stanza is not incomplete in itself, but the speaker adds an extrametrical clause in prose at the end, and *Nj*

Lack of Compatibility between Verse and Prose

In complete contrast to the kinds of close connection between verse and prose in many late sagas of Icelanders described in the previous section of this chapter, there is a small number of late sagas in which there are major discrepancies between the two media. These have probably arisen when an older saga narrative incorporating poetry, whether oral or written or both, has been revised and expanded by someone writing in the fourteenth century. *Landnámabók* [The Book of Settlements] refers to various narratives (using the noun *saga*) that deal with the people and events that appear in some of the extant sagas of Icelanders and sometimes reproduces stanzas that have also survived in these sagas. The oldest versions of *Landnámabók* are no longer extant, but are thought to date from the twelfth century. The earliest version associated with a named author, Styrmir Kárason, must have antedated his death in 1245, but it no longer exists. *Sturlubók*, written by Sturla Þórðarson, who died in 1284, provides the oldest extant medieval version of *Landnámabók* and the *terminus post quem* for the dating of references to saga narratives and their contents within it.[53]

Two late sagas of Icelanders of interest in this regard are *Svarfdœla saga* and *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. An incident in *Svarfdœla saga* is described in very similar terms in *Landnámabók* to its representation in the saga, and both texts cite a stanza by Þorleifr jarlsskáld [Jarl's Poet] (*Svarfd* 5), vowing vengeance upon a man who has slashed the bag in which the poet was collecting moss for his mother, an event that leads to a much wider local feud in the extant saga. Jakob Benediktsson (*loc. cit*.) was of the view that *Sturlubók* was drawing on an older, now lost version of *Svarfdœla saga* for this information, which Sturla acknowledges immediately after citing the stanza with the words 'Þar af gerðisk Svarfdœla saga' [From that [event] *Svarfdœla saga* was made].[54] We cannot know exactly what this postulated early version of *Svarfdœla saga* was like, except that it seems to have had a similar story-line to the extant saga and to have contained at least one stanza by Þorleifr jarlsskáld, whose adult experiences were the subject of a *þáttr* recorded in Flateyjarbók.

All seventeen of the stanzas in the extant *Svarfdœla saga* are found only in the middle part of the saga dealing with the settlement of Þorsteinn svǫrfuðr [the Ruthless], his family and neighbours in the north-eastern Icelandic valley

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12, but again, the name *Þráinn*, added here, is extrametrical and not needed by the syntax of the stanza (see Note 2 to *Nj* 12 in *SkP* V).

53 For discussion of the relationships between the various versions of *Landnámabók* and the poetry contained in it, see Jakob Benediktsson, 'Versene i Landnámabók', *Gardar*, 6 (1975), 7–25, especially at p. 12, and his Introduction to *ÍF* 1.

54 *ÍF* 1, p. 254.

named after him, Svarfaðardalur. Editors of the saga and its poetry[55] have found significant differences between the events as related in the prose text and the content and placement of many of the stanzas, especially *Svarfd* 10–12 and 14. *Svarfd* 10 appears to be a response to *Svarfd* 12, and should therefore come after not before it, while the content of *Svarfd* 11, which refers to the hiding place of a couple of boys among caves as 'a childlike lair', does not accord with the prose text's reference to an indoor hiding place in a farmstead. *Svarfd* 14 speaks of bad weather and fog, but nothing of this is mentioned in the prose text. Such discrepancies have suggested that the author of the revised saga, probably put together at some time in the fourteenth century, did not have a good understanding of the poetry and misplaced it in his text. The character of the poetry itself supports this hypothesis. The stanzas are in *dróttkvætt* or *fornyrðislag*. While there is nothing in them that gives a firm indication of date, some stanzas have linguistic features that support a thirteenth-century dating,[56] thus suggesting that an earlier text has been repurposed and the poetry it contained retrofitted into a later prose context.

Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings [The Saga of Hávarðr from Ísafjörður] is generally regarded as one of the youngest of the sagas of Icelanders, yet the main parameters of its plot and its main characters are mentioned in *Landnámabók*, in this case in both *Sturlubók* and the younger *Hauksbók*, named for its commissioner and part-scribe, Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334). While no poetry from the earlier version of the saga narrative is cited in *Landnámabók*, there are two places there where key events and characters in the narrative are mentioned. Hávarðr's dealings with his chief adversary, Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson, are noted as the substance of a narrative: 'þar gerðisk saga þeira Þorbjarnar ok Hávarðar ens halta'[57] [there [in Ísafjörður] the narrative of Þorbjǫrn and Hávarðr the Lame took place]. Elsewhere there is a similar notice: 'þar í Laugardal bjó síðan Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson, er vá Óláf, son Hávarðar halta ok Bjargeyjar Valbrandsdóttur; þar af gerðisk saga Ísfirðinga ok víg Þorbjarnar'[58] [There in Laugardalur lived afterwards Þorbjǫrn Þjóðreksson, who killed Óláfr, son of Hávarðr the Lame and Bjargey, daughter of Valbrandr. The story of the people of Ísafjörður and the killing of Þorbjǫrn resulted from these events.]

As with *Svarfdœla saga*, some of the stanzas in the extant *Hávarðar saga* (e.g. *Háv* 12, 13, 14) do not fit the prose narrative well,[59] and several of them mention characters by name who do not appear in the extant saga, or

55 See *ÍF* 9, pp. lxxi–lxxii, xci–xcii n. 3 and Kari Ellen Gade's Introduction to *Svarfdœla saga* in *SkP* V, as well as her Notes to *Svarfd* 10–12 and 14.

56 For these see *ÍF* 9, p. xci and n. 2.

57 *ÍF* 1, p. 159.

58 *ÍF* 1, p. 190.

59 As Finnur Jónsson observed, 'Versene i Hávarðar saga', in *Festskrift til Ludv. F.*

they appear to give special emphasis to the role of a character which is not apparent from the prose text.[60] There has been some debate about whether the poetry in *Hávarðar saga* is earlier than the extant saga, and has been corrupted in transmission, or whether the stanzas belong to a different version of the story behind the saga and were incorporated into it at a late stage of its development.[61] Many of the stanzas in this saga show signs of textual corruption and in some cases their meanings are uncertain. There are numerous examples of metrical flaws and several cases where words are either used in ways unfamiliar in skaldic poetry or do not occur in any other Old Norse text. Some but not all of the technical deficiencies in the poetry point either to scribal corruption in transmission or to late composition, probably post-1300.[62]

The various relations between poetry and prose in late sagas of Icelanders point overall to a less secure connection between the two than obtained in sagas of the thirteenth century, whether that is manifested in a reuse of older material that does not quite fit a new reworking, or shows up in a more decorative, less integral use of poetry to give emotional impact to the prose text, or in a somewhat academic showing off of unusual mythological references and clever word-play. Exceptional in this group of sagas are the numbers of stanzas attributed to female characters, which reveal a new, though limited, taste for romance and the display of women's emotions.

A. Wimmer ved hans 70 års fødselsdag (Copenhagen, 1909), pp. 86–97, at pp. 95–6.

60 In *Háv* 5, 7, 9 and 12 there are repeated references to a Hallgrímr, in the extant saga Hávarðr's wife's nephew, but in *Landnámabók* his wife's brother, hinting that he played a more important role in the narrative that the extant saga reveals. *Háv* 8 mentions a Geirdís as the mother of one of the characters, Eyjólfr Valbrandsson, as if the saga audience was fully aware of her, although she is not mentioned there.

61 So Anne Holtsmark, 'Litt om overleveringen i Håvards saga', in Johannes Brøndum-Nielsen *et al.* (eds), *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson 29. maj 1928* (Copenhagen, 1928), pp. 86–97, at pp. 82–3.

62 Examples suggesting fourteenth-century composition are *Háv* 10/4 (desyllabification) and 13/6 (violation of Craigie's law).

8

Sagas without Poetry

Why are some Sagas of Icelanders without Poetry?

To ask the question with which I begin this final chapter of the present study of poetry in sagas of Icelanders is to assume that the normal condition of these literary works was to include a mix of prose and verse, a *prosimetrum*, in at least some parts of their texts. Statistically this assumption has to be correct: as we have seen in Chapter 1, all but nine of the approximately forty extant sagas of Icelanders contain poetry, while three sagas, *Grœnlendinga saga*, *Reykdœla saga* and *Vatnsdœla saga*, have only a single stanza that also appears in another text. These three sagas have been added to the nine in which poetry is entirely absent for the purposes of the present chapter, but, even so, the combined number of twelve sagas without poetry is slightly less than a third of the total.

The majority of the stanzas in sagas of Icelanders are in skaldic metres, most often *dróttkvætt*, though a smaller proportion are in *fornyrðislag*, *kviðuháttr* and *runhent*. However, *dróttkvætt* is the dominant metre of this sub-genre and this distinguishes it from *fornaldarsögur* on the one hand, where the dominant metre is *fornyrðislag*, and from both translated and indigenous romances, on the other, which do not incorporate any poetry into their narratives. The use of *dróttkvætt* within the *prosimetrum* also signals the affinity of sagas of Icelanders with other kinds of vernacular historical writing, kings' sagas, contemporary sagas and sagas of bishops, in all of which skaldic metres dominate, although some use of eddic verse-forms may also be found there. The absence of verse in the group of sagas without poetry may therefore signal an affinity of some of them with the sub-genre of the romance, and this explanation seems to fit several within the group of late sagas, particularly *Finnboga saga ramma*, *Fljótsdœla saga*, *Gull-Þóris saga* and *Kjalnesinga saga*. However, this suggested explanation does not account for all twelve verse-less sagas, particularly those that are likely to date from the early thirteenth century.

The lack of poetry in Old Norse translated and indigenous romances in its turn probably indicates an awareness on the part of both authors and

audiences that this sub-genre's subject matter was untraditional, legendary and often non-Scandinavian and so inappropriate to the mixture of verse and prose found in sagas with broadly historical subjects. There seems to have been a general reluctance to use native poetry to translate a range of works from foreign languages into Old Norse, except in a few cases, such as the anonymous *Plácitusdrápa* (Anon *Pl*[VII]) and Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínusspá* (GunnLeif *Merl I* and *II*[VIII]). Thus the absence of poetry in late sagas of Icelanders with affinities to romances may indicate a perception that their subject matter is closer to the fabulous or the folk-tale than to the supposedly historical subjects of most sagas of Icelanders.

It is unlikely that any single explanation can account for the absence of poetry in some sagas of Icelanders and it would be naive to assume that any one reason for its absence would cover them all. Some conceivable reasons must remain at the level of speculation, including the possibility that no poetry existed about the persons and events recorded in a particular saga. There is also the further possibility that those people responsible for creating the written saga chose not to incorporate poetry into it for several potential reasons, which may have included a distrust of the material's historicity. In the analysis below, I have assumed that there were probably several reasons for the absence of poetry in these sagas, but that, although no certainty can be reached on the matter, one can nevertheless point to particular factors that are likely to have played a part in determining the verse-less condition of individual sagas.

Towards an Explanation

Table 8 at the end of this chapter lists the twelve sagas of Icelanders that have no poetry or have only a single stanza also found in another saga or, in one case, Anon *Hafg* 2[IV], in *Landnámabók* and the compilation Flateyjarbók. The sagas are further divided into early, classical (1250–80) and late groups on the basis of their assumed dates, which follow those of the Íslenzk fornrit editors, unless otherwise signalled. Finally, the geographical location or locations in Iceland of the sagas' main action are given and may be checked in greater detail on the website <sagamap.hi.is/is/>.

Of the two factors noted in the list above, date and location, the first does not seem to be an independently important factor in determining whether or not a saga includes poetry, although a saga's probable date is undoubtedly significant, as we have seen in previous chapters, in determining a range of its literary characteristics, some of which may indirectly influence the presence or absence of poetry. On the other hand, the location of the saga action, and the presumed centre of literary creativity that led to the genesis of a particular saga, seems to have been a very important variable and may have been, overall, the most important determinant, independently of age

and literary character, of whether or not a given saga contains poetry. Most editors and commentators on sagas of Icelanders have generally assumed that these works, about local heroes, local feuds and family disputes, were the creations of local men, possibly members of the priesthood or men attached to the households of neighbouring large farms. If this assumption is correct, the oral traditions of a local area must have provided the basis for the coalescence of prose narratives and poetry in saga form. Hence it is a reasonable working hypothesis that some areas of Iceland may have had a richer heritage of poetic traditions than others,[1] and the objective evidence of the correlation between saga locations and the presence or absence of poetry seems to bear this out.

It is clear from **Table 8** that a high proportion of the sagas listed there have a northern or an eastern Icelandic location, and in some of them the casts of characters overlap to a considerable degree, suggesting shared local traditions.[2] The group of early northern sagas without poetry, *Ljósvetninga saga* [The Saga of the People of Ljósavatn], *Reykdœla saga* [The Saga of the People of Reykjadalur], *Valla-Ljóts saga* [The Saga of Ljótr of Vellir] and the north-eastern *Vápnfirðinga saga* [The Saga of the People of Vopnafjörður], are particularly prominent in this regard. Theodore Andersson and William

1 Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld and Oral Poetry in the West of Iceland c. 1250: The Evidence of References to Poetry in *The Third Grammatical Treatise*', in Margaret Clunies Ross (ed.), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 96–115, concluded that poetic activity in the west of the country was probably greater than in other areas and Guðrún Nordal's survey (*Tools of Literacy*. *The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2001)) of elite poets active in Iceland in the thirteenth century, whose compositions are found mainly in *Sturlunga saga* and sagas of bishops, supports such a view, although noting poetic activity in other regions dependent on patronage from contemporary high-ranking families (see Table 4.3 on p. 139).

2 This connection has been explored in recent decades by Theodore Andersson in several works, partially summarised in *The Partisan Muse in the Early Icelandic Sagas (1200–1250)*. Islandica 55 (Ithaca, New York, 2012), Chapters 6, 'Domestic Politics in Northern Iceland', pp. 143–70 and 7, 'Warrior Poets in the Northwest', pp. 171–87. Recently Chris Callow, *Landscape, Tradition and Power in Medieval Iceland: Dalir and the Eyjafjörður region c. 870-c. 1265*. The Northern World 80 (Leiden and Boston, 2020), has produced a geopolitical study of the group of early northern sagas of Icelanders and compared their picture of power structures in the north with those of *Sturlunga saga* for the same area in the thirteenth century. Interestingly he concludes (p. 307) that 'none of the Íslendingasögur seem to serve to reinforce or justify the power of thirteenth-century leaders' and infers from this 'an earlier date [than usually assumed] for most, if not all, of the contents of the surviving texts'.

Miller examined the extensive overlapping cast of characters shared between *Ljósvetninga saga* and other sagas in great detail in their *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland*.[3] This kind of overlap holds for narratives involving the same generation of men and women as well as some that are intergenerational, where one saga tells the prequel or the sequel to a narrative set out in another. For example, *Reykdœla saga* presents characters of a generation earlier than those of *Valla-Ljóts saga*, while *Valla-Ljóts saga* provides a partial sequel to *Svarfdœla saga*. *Fljótsdœla saga* provides a sequel to *Hrafnkels saga* and, more importantly, a prequel to *Droplaugarsona saga*, by giving an account of how the Droplaugarsynir's mother, the daughter of a jarl, came to Iceland from the Shetland Islands after having survived harsh treatment by a giant and imprisonment in a cave.

The evidence presented here leads one to conclude that, as far as poetic traditions connected to the narratives of sagas of Icelanders are concerned, the composers of sagas set in the north and the east of the country did not on the whole favour the inclusion of poetry, even though they obviously drew on a rich store of traditional tales. Their reasons for this, as we examine below, were probably partly connected with the nature and subjects of their narratives, but may also have reflected an absence of local poetry, even though some northern or eastern sagas, such as *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga* and *Svarfdœla saga*, demonstrate that poetry associated with these areas did exist and was used in some local sagas.

It is particularly striking that there is no surviving poetry associated with narratives about the chieftain Guðmundr inn ríki [the Powerful] Eyjólfsson of Möðruvellir, a man of great importance to the action of numerous sagas, and one whose character is treated with considerable subtlety by the writer of *Ljósvetninga saga*, as Andersson and Miller have described in detail.[4] By contrast, even though Guðmundr's brother Einarr þveræingr [from Þverá][5] Eyjólfsson plays a lesser part in this saga and others, he has a presence both as a player in local politics and as a poet in *Víga-Glúms saga*, where a stanza (*Glúm* 11) is attributed to him, and as a staunch defender of the Icelanders'

3 Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, pp. 85–93.

4 See *Law and Literature*, pp. 86–90.

5 Einarr's farm, previously owned by Víga-Glúmr, was at Þverá, later Munkaþverá, in Eyjafjörður, where a Benedictine monastery was established in 1155, while his brother Guðmundr's farm was at Möðruvellir, which continued to be an important farm and a literary centre until the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. Individuals living at both these places are very likely to have been custodians of traditions connected to the brothers, which possibly (in Guðmundr's case) and certainly (in Einarr's) included poetry. Möðruvellir also gave its name to the most important medieval collection of sagas of Icelanders, Möðruvallabók (AM 132 fol), and it is likely that this manuscript was compiled there in the mid-fourteenth century.

retention of the island of Grimsey in the face of King Óláfr Haraldsson's desire to annex it to Norway, something we know only from historical sources. A stanza of Einarr's on this subject is recorded in one manuscript describing this famous incident.[6]

The Early Group

The group of four early sagas without poetry have a great deal in common from a literary point of view, aside from their northern or north-eastern location.[7] As they are perhaps among the least generally known sagas of Icelanders, this analysis begins with a short summary of their contents and literary characteristics.

Ljósvetninga saga, set in the area around Eyjafjörður and Reykjadalur/Ljósavatn, deals with the rivalry between two powerful chieftain families in these adjacent areas and their hinterlands over two to three generations. The saga is episodic, moving briskly from one short narrative of conflict and fighting to another. Many of the episodes involve complex debates on points of law or the presentation of particular and unusual ruses designed to take an enemy by surprise and outwit (or kill) him. Several episodes (*Sǫrla þáttr*, *Ófeigs þáttr*, *Vǫðu-Brands þáttr*) seem to function as exempla, intended to throw light on the character of Guðmundr inn ríki of Möðruvellir. In accordance with the episodic nature of this saga, a great many characters are involved, but they are mostly crisply delineated vignettes rather than in-depth presentations of characters in action. An obvious exception to this generalisation is the presentation of the character of Guðmundr inn ríki himself. Numerous episodes draw on a variety of literary devices, including dreams and exempla, to reveal his weaknesses as well as his strengths. Female participants are important to this saga, but by and large not as developed characters. Rather, the fate of women and the arrangement of marriages are presented as determined largely by the complex friendships and hostilities between men.

Reykdœla saga ok Víga-Skútu is a tale of opposites, the 'noble heathen' Áskell *goði* Eyvindarson and his violent son Víga-Skúta. Áskell dies in

6 This is Eþver Lv 1[I]; see Diana Whaley's edition of the stanza and Einarr's biography in *SkP* I (2012), 2, p. 804. It is generally accepted that both this stanza and *Glúm* 11 are likely to be authentic compositions by Einarr.

7 *Grœnlendinga saga* [The Saga of the Greenlanders] has been left out of this summary of early sagas, because it is not a text whose main action is set in the north or east of Iceland. Its affinity, in spite of some of the exotic details of life in Greenland and North America that it contains, is with historical material, as is signalled by its inclusion in the Flateyjarbók compendium. Its first chapter cites a half-stanza, also in *Landnámabók*, from the so-called *Hafgerðingadrápa* '*Drápa* of the Ocean Fences', supposedly the composition of a Hebridean man on board a ship bound for Greenland.

a skirmish mid-way through the saga and the remaining narrative details Skúta's vengeance for his father's death. The saga concerns the third and fourth generations of settlers in Eyjafjörður, Skjálfandi and Reykjadalur and overlaps to some extent with *Víga-Glúms saga*, with which it shares one half-stanza. *Reykdœla saga* has a large cast of characters, and its narrative, mostly concerned with local quarrels and their outcomes, usually killings, is episodic and very detailed. The authorial voice, which is more varied and more intrusive than that of most saga narrators, strains for the truth and is often aware of conflicting oral traditions, invoking a diversity of viewpoints about the course of events.[8]

Valla-Ljóts saga, whose northern location encompasses Svarfaðardalur and Eyjafjörður, is difficult to date with any precision. In terms of its content, however, this saga is a sort of sequel to *Svarfdœla saga*, as far as its setting and personnel are concerned.[9] The dealings between Halli Sigurðarson (a descendant of Karl inn rauði [the Red]) and Valla-Ljótr (son of Ljótólfr *goði*) mimic the imbalance of power depicted in *Svarfdœla saga*. The main narrative presents the over-ambitious Halli trying to encroach on Ljótr's territory, which leads predictably to Ljótr's killing of Halli in a duel. The conflict escalates and Halli's brother Hrólfr kills Ljótr's sister's son Þorvarðr. Further episodes in the feud follow in quick succession and the action is swift-moving and dramatic. Eventually the two most powerful chieftains in the area, Valla-Ljótr and Guðmundr inn ríki, manage to settle the feud.

Vápnfirðinga saga, which may be a little younger than the other sagas considered here, is mainly located further to the east, in Vopnafjörður. It has been very poorly preserved and all extant manuscripts contain a large lacuna. The saga details the dealings of the two most important families in Vopnafjörður, the Hofsverjar and the Krossvíkingar, across two generations. It has a tighter structure than the northern sagas because it concentrates on enmity between members of only two families. It also explores the poignant struggle between these men, who are friends and (foster) kinsmen as well as enemies. In the senior generation it is Geitir versus Brodd-Helgi. Geitir kills Brodd-Helgi, who has many flaws of character – he is cruel and avaricious

[8] The poet Glúmr Geirason and his father enter the narrative in chapters 17–18 (*ÍF* 10, pp. 204–11) but there is no word there about Glúmr's reputation as a court poet of the Norwegian kings Eiríkr blóðøx and Haraldr gráfeldr; see his biography in *SkP* I (2012), 1, p. 245. Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendingadrápa* of c. 1150 includes a stanza (HaukrV *Ísldr* II^{IV}) commemorating Glúmr, which alludes to an incident also mentioned in *Reykdœla saga* (ch. 19, *ÍF* 10, pp. 211–14), about Glúmr's brother Þorkell, rather than Glúmr himself, as the poem has it.

[9] In its present form *Svarfdœla saga* is probably of fourteenth-century date and thus considerably younger than *Valla-Ljóts saga*, but the saga's narrative involves the previous generation of Icelanders.

and behaves very badly to his wife Halla, sister of Geitir. Then Bjarni son of Brodd-Helgi kills Geitir, his foster-father, but immediately repents of it in a moving and tragic scene.[10] Þorkell, son of Geitir, finally achieves reconciliation with Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, urged on by his wife Jórunn (on her, see further below), the daughter of Einarr þveræingr. This saga is a more promising candidate for the inclusion of poetry, as its tight structure allows the author to explore the protagonists' characters, but there is none, in spite of the cross-references in it to the saga of the Droplaugarsynir.[11]

There are several characteristics of the early group of verse-less sagas that may have contributed to their authors' refraining from the use of poetry. The first of these is the nature and structure of the sagas' narratives. With the exception of *Vápnfirðinga saga*, all these sagas are episodic and their narrative action moves at a fast pace. As a consequence they present a large cast of characters, who change frequently and are not often developed in the sort of depth that might be conducive to the presentation of their inner thoughts in the form of poetic stanzas. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the introduction of poetry as the utterance of characters in the narrative tends to act as a means of slowing the pace of narrative action, and that would have been incompatible with the fast-moving style of the early northern group of sagas.

The persona of the narrator in this group of sagas is another variable that may have precluded their authors' use of poetry. Although they vary in character from one to the other, all the narrative voices tend to make their presence felt directly in ways that might be seen to be in conflict with a narrative style that presents an authorial voice indirectly largely through characterisation and poetic discourse. Andersson and Miller characterise the narrative voice of *Ljósvetninga saga* as 'outspoken',[12] and the same could be said of the authorial voice of *Valla-Ljóts saga*. The narrator of *Reykdœla saga* is an extremely busy presence, announcing when characters will appear in the text, adding details and commenting on alternative versions of a particular story.[13] He also offers direct assessments of characters in the narrative; for example, when contrasting the characters of Víga-Skuta and Víga-Glúmr he

10 Ch. 14, *ÍF* 10, pp. 52–3. According to Icelandic annals, Geitir died in 987 (see *ÍF* 10, pp. xxii–xxiii).

11 Haukr Valdísarson also considered the subject matter of *Vápnfirðinga saga* worthy of poetic celebration, as he devoted the first four stanzas of his *Íslendingadrápa* to its main characters.

12 Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, p. 98.

13 For example, in ch. 17 (*ÍF* 10, p. 204) the narrator prepares his audience for new episodes about Víga-Skuta, who has just come into prominence in the saga after his father's death, with the words 'sem enn mun heyra mega síðar í sǫgunni' [as can be heard later in the saga].

remarks pithily 'Váru þeir eigi samlyndir, mágar' [They were not of comparable dispositions, the kinsmen-in-law].[14]

A third variable which may well have contributed to the avoidance of poetry in these sagas is the roles they give to women in their narratives and the ways in which female characters are represented there. In earlier chapters we have noted the significant expansion that was required in the stylistic resources of skaldic diction following the increased attention given to female characters and male-female relationships in sagas of Icelanders compared with other saga genres. In Chapter 5 it was established that topics associated with women were the second most frequent in the skaldic corpus within sagas of Icelanders after the subjects of fights and battles. The early northern sagas of Icelanders are characterised by the absence of developed female characters. Their main subjects, inter-familial and regional power struggles and feuds, were men's business, although such conflict was often sparked by quarrels over women. Crucially, however, these sagas do not present their female characters as rounded individuals and do not foreground in their narratives the important part some women played in them. Thus one of the chief topics of poetry in sagas of Icelanders is unlikely to have been attractive to those who created this group of early sagas.

It would be misleading, however, to give the impression that relations between men and women are unimportant in these sagas. Their significance in the complexities of marriage arrangements and potential disputes is clear. The opening chapter of *Ljósvetninga saga*, for example, is about the failed abduction of the daughter of a farmer named Ǫlvir by a local troublemaker, Sǫlmundr. Nothing is said of the woman's feelings in the matter, and she is not even named; what is important in this short episode is the restoration of family honour and the consolidation of social order.

There are other examples in these sagas that open a window onto the politicking and plotting among men that has a direct impact on the fates of women, especially in their marriages, and sometimes reveals that the women concerned had an active part to play in facilitating such deals, although this information is mostly relayed by the authorial voice rather than through the interaction of the characters themselves. An example here, also from *Ljósvetninga saga*,[15] concerns a successful attempt by a couple of local politicians to make it difficult for Einarr þveræingr Eyjólfsson to support his brother Guðmundr's cause in a legal dispute with Þorkell Geitisson by persuading him to marry his daughter, Jórunn, to Þorkell and thereby set up a kinship bond between the two men that would make it difficult for Einarr to side with Guðmundr in the dispute. The stratagem succeeds and Jórunn is married to Þorkell. The episode concludes with an assessment by the authorial

14 *ÍF* 10, p. 230.

15 *ÍF* 10, pp. 135–9; Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, pp. 155–62.

voice of Jórunn's outstanding worth: 'En Jórunn var inn mesti kvenskǫrungr, sem ætt hennar var til'[16] [And Jórunn was the most outstanding of women, as one would expect from her lineage]. Then the narrator goes on (*loc. cit.*) to extol another of her virtues, which is also celebrated at the conclusion of *Vápnfirðinga saga*[17]: 'Hon kom ok því til leiðar, sem engi hafði áðr komit, at þeir sættusk frændrnir, Þorkell Geitisson ok Bjarni Brodd-Helgason' [She also brought it about, something no one had previously done, that the kinsmen Þorkell Geitisson and Bjarni Brodd-Helgason were reconciled].

The Middle Group

The middle group of sagas without poetry, comprising *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* [The Saga of Hrafnkell, *goði* of Freyr], *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* [The Saga of Hen-Þórir] and *Vatnsdœla saga* [The Saga of the People of Vatnsdalur], belong to the so-called classical period of saga composition in the middle decades of the thirteenth century. They are generally much better known than those of the early group, but nevertheless this part of the discussion begins with a brief account of their contents and literary characteristics. Unlike the early group, they are not all set in northern Iceland: *Hrafnkels saga* is set in the east, while *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* takes place mainly in the west around Borgarfjörður and Breiðafjörður. *Vatnsdœla saga* is located in the north-west, in Vatnsdalur, Skagafjörður and the Húnavatnsþing area.

Hrafnkels saga tells the story of the rise and fall of a chieftain whose inflexible decision to kill a young man who rides his prize stallion, Freyfaxi, leads to his humiliation but the eventual restoration of his status, while his irresolute opponent, Sámr, loses out and is obliged to return to his former, lowly position in society. The saga is short, the plot tightly constructed, the narrative fast-moving, and character portraits are economical and externally focused. Women are hardly mentioned, except as servants. The authorial voice is very self-assured and direct and there is little room for innuendo. For example, the narrator tells that 'Hrafnkell byggði allan dalinn ok gaf mǫnnum land, en vildi þó vera yfirmaðr þeira ok tók goðorð yfir þeim' [Hrafnkell settled the whole valley and gave men land, but yet wanted to be their master and assumed the office of *goðorð* over them].[18] There is no indication in the text of how Hrafnkell managed to assert his authority over his neighbours; it just happened.

16 *ÍF* 10, p. 139.

17 Ch. 19, *ÍF* 11, pp. 64–5. It is interesting to contrast the two accounts. The praise of Jórunn in *Ljósvetninga saga* is delivered by the saga narrator in the third person, whereas the scene in *Vápnfirðinga saga* gives both Jórunn and Þorkell the power of direct speech.

18 Ch. 2, *ÍF* 11, p. 99.

Hœnsa-Þóris saga [The Saga of Hen-Þórir] is like *Hrafnkels saga* in being short, tightly constructed and fast-moving. The narrative style is largely objective and impersonal, though the story is often advanced by means of very well-controlled dialogue, often pithy and amusing. The plot, which turns on the issue of the fair distribution of hay to a group of farmers during a hard winter, is complex and involves a number of sub-plots in the form of legal ruses or tricks. This structural complexity in turn demands a large cast of characters, who are introduced as required. The main characters (Blund-Ketill, Hœnsa-Þórir, Tungu-Oddr) are economically drawn and belong to recognisable and contrasting types. While Blund-Ketill exemplifies virtue and generosity, Hœnsa-Þórir is malevolent without good reason, and his behaviour is mean beyond the bounds of avarice. Female characters are involved only to further men's interests, though there are a few glimpses of female independence towards the end of the saga, such as Jófríðr Gunnarsdóttir's decision to spend time in a tent because she is bored with life at home, and it is somewhere she can be visited by the man she fancies, Þóroddr, son of Tungu-Oddr, who is later reconciled with her father and marries her.[19]

Vatnsdœla saga, which probably belongs chronologically with *Hrafnkels saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, shares very little with them in terms of structure and content, on the one hand, and location on the other. The narrative voice is relatively intrusive and has a pronounced interest in old customs, particularly religious ones, and in beliefs in the supernatural, especially forms of witchcraft. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, who edited the saga for the Íslenzk fornrit series, associated it with texts emanating from the local Benedictine monastery of Þingeyrar in Húnavatnssýsla, and it has a learned, somewhat antiquarian tone.[20] The saga's generic affinities are mixed. The first section is reminiscent of a *fornaldarsaga* and creates a picture of the chieftains of

19 Ch. 16, *ÍF* 3, p. 42: 'Jófríðr, dóttir Gunnars, átti sér tjald úti, því at henni þótti þat ódaufligra' [Jófríðr, Gunnarr's daughter, had a tent for her own use outdoors, because that seemed to her less boring]. She entertains Þóroddr there, initially without her father's knowledge.

20 See Einar Ólafur's Introduction to *ÍF* 8, pp. v–xiv, li–lvi. Monks from Þingeyrar were very active in the production of literary and historical texts in the last decade of the twelfth and the first decades of the thirteenth century, both in Latin and in Icelandic. Among them were Oddr Snorrason, who wrote a Latin biography of King Óláfr Tryggvason, which was later translated into Icelandic and Gunnlaugr Leifsson (d. 1219), who also composed a Latin life of Óláfr Tryggvason as well as a Latin life of Bishop Jón Ǫgmundarson, and an Icelandic verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophecies of Merlin*, the *Merlínuspá* (GunnLeif *Merl* I-II^{VIII}). A third notable author from Þingeyrar was Abbot Karl Jónsson (d. 1212), who compiled *Sverris saga*, partly under the supervision of King Sverrir himself (d. 1202).

Vatnsdalur as individuals with noble Norwegian ancestors. No scenes of conflict are built into this section; the protagonists succeed in everything they do effortlessly and with no opposition. Once Ingimundr and other relatives arrive in Iceland, however, (and the settlement of Vatnsdalur is represented as an almost paradisal land-taking), the saga proceeds with one episode after another in which family members conquer and banish or kill a range of troublemakers, sorcerers and dangerous animals. The focus is upon the succession of chieftains who rule the valley and own the *goðorð*.

There are some semi-independent narrative units within the saga whose focus differs from that of the main story-line, such as the incursion of Finnbogi inn rammi [the Strong] into the district in chapters 32–5 and the circumstances in which Þorkell krafla [Scrabbler] is saved from being put out to die as a baby. Exactly why this saga author chose not to cite any poetry, aside from the one half-stanza about a handsome young womaniser that it has in common with *Hallfreðar saga*, can only be guessed at. One possibility, if the association with the literary traditions of Þingeyrar has any traction, is that the saga author considered his narrative as more akin to the learned writings of the Þingeyrar school than to the generic model of sagas of Icelanders.

When we seek for reasons why the creators of *Hrafnkels saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga* chose not to use the medium of *prosimetrum*, we find some of the same likely explanations as we canvassed for the four early sagas without poetry, namely the fast pace of the narrative action, the complexity of the plot and the large cast of characters (in *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, but not in *Hrafnkels saga*), with little space given to female protagonists. In both sagas there is a tendency towards the delineation of characters in terms of moral opposites, whether virtuous or vicious, which leaves little room for the probing of complexities of character in a poetic medium. Heather O'Donoghue came to a similar conclusion about the reasons why *Hrafnkels saga* lacked poetry, but her main focus was on the character of Hrafnkell himself, arguing that the protagonist's inner life was simply not on display: 'Hrafnkell's relationships with other characters are largely … a function of his position as an autocrat. … He expresses himself almost wholly through dialogue and action, and there is little illumination of his inner life'.[21] She adds the observation that 'Hrafnkell shows no inclination towards verbal display in any form.'[22]

21 Heather O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005), p. 229.

22 *Op. cit*., p. 240.

The Late Group

There are four late sagas of Icelanders that contain no poetry, *Finnboga saga ramma* [The Saga of Finnbogi the Strong], *Fljótsdæla saga* [The Saga of the People of Fljótsdalur], *Kjalnesinga saga* [The Saga of the People of Kjalarnes] and *Þorskfirðinga saga* [The Saga of the People of Þorskafjörður], also known as *Gull-Þóris saga* [The Saga of Gold-Þórir]. In terms of geographical location, the setting of *Finnboga saga* overlaps with those of *Ljósvetninga saga* and *Vatnsdæla saga* in the north and north-west, while *Fljótsdæla saga* is set in the east, and overlaps in subject matter with another eastern saga, *Droplaugarsona saga*. *Kjalnesinga saga* is located in the west, just north of modern Reykjavík, and *Þorskfirðinga saga* takes place partly in the Westfjords (Vestfirðir) and partly outside Iceland. All four of these late sagas include substantial sections set overseas, a characteristic that suggests their affinity with *fornaldarsögur* and romances, whose settings are also non-Icelandic.

All four sagas without poetry in the late group are probably to be dated after the beginning of the fourteenth century. A summary of their plots and stylistic characteristics shows that, although much of their subject matter belongs with that of the majority of sagas of Icelanders, they also contain a substantial admixture of elements more typical of *fornaldarsögur*, indigenous romances and even folk-tales. They are thus generic hybrids whose position between sub-genres may provide the strongest indicator of why they do not use poetry. If they had done so, it could be argued that the poetry would more likely have been in eddic rather than skaldic metres, following the example of *fornaldarsögur*.

The characters of *Finnboga saga* overlap to some extent with those of *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga* but this saga's main emphasis is biographical, concentrating on the life of Finnbogi inn rammi [the Strong] Ásbjarnarson, whose real-life counterpart is mentioned briefly in *Landnámabók*.[23] According to the saga, Finnbogi begins life as a foundling after his father had ordered that he be exposed. Like many folk-tale heroes, he is fostered by a poor couple and called by the name Urðarkǫttr [Scree-cat] until he carries out his first heroic deed, after which he adopts the name Finnbogi from a man he has rescued at sea. The early part of the saga (up to chapter 22) is somewhat of a blend of *fornaldarsaga* and romance; the hero is incredibly strong, but also good-natured and even courtly, and has adventure after adventure with a variety of antagonists, including shipwrecked men, bears and treacherous Norwegians. In Norway Finnbogi is supported by Hákon jarl Sigurðarson of Hlaðir and sent on a mission to Byzantium, where

[23] *ÍF* I, p. 273. Finnbogi is also celebrated in stanza 14 of Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendingadrápa* (HaukrV *Ísldr* 14[IV]).

he has further adventures. Once he is back in Iceland, the saga develops into a feud story, in which the sons of Ingimundr, *goði* of Vatnsdalur, become jealous of Finnbogi, and Jǫkull in particular seeks to destroy him. This part of the saga comprises numerous episodes in which Finnbogi repulses various kinds of attack from Jǫkull and the assailants he sends to kill him. None succeed, but towards the end of the saga Finnbogi is forced to move his farm from Viðidalur to Trékyllisvík in the Westfjords, where he also prospers. In the penultimate chapters 39–41 there are three parallel accounts of how he kills men sent by Jǫkull to assassinate him, after he is apparently overcome with a strange sleepiness, from which he wakes in the nick of time.

The narrative style of *Finnboga saga* is hard to characterise: it is straightforward but sometimes wordy; its vocabulary includes many idiomatic words possibly new in written Icelandic of the early fourteenth century.[24] The dialogue is brisk and well-controlled. The narrative voice is largely objective, but at times offers an opinion or value-judgement. If there had been poetry about Finnbogi available, there is no reason why it could not have been used in this saga. However, internal evidence in the saga itself suggests that stories about this larger-than-life hero took the form of short fables, detailing his marvellous feats of strength which were often accompanied by supernatural happenings, and these would have been more appropriately celebrated in eddic rather than skaldic verse-forms.

The subject matter of *Fljótsdæla saga* overlaps with that of two other eastern sagas, *Hrafnkels saga* and *Droplaugarsona saga*, as well as with *Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana* [Short Tale of Gunnarr, Killer of Þiðrandi] and *Laxdæla saga*. In chronological terms the saga is a continuation of *Hrafnkels saga* involving the following generation, while it also takes the narrative back a generation before *Droplaugarsona saga* to present the history of the father of the Droplaugarsynir, Þorvaldr Þiðrandason, his adventures in Shetland, and his marriage with Droplaug, daughter of Bjǫrgólfr jarl. She had been abducted by a giant, Geitir, who had tied her up in a cave, and was rescued by Þorvaldr, who later married her. The narrative then turns to Þorvaldr's return to Iceland, accompanied by Droplaug, her mother Árneiðr, and later her sister Gróa. Þorvaldr is drowned in Lake Lagarfljót after Droplaug has a premonition of his death. The saga's later chapters develop various feud themes and are detailed and very dramatic. Many of the conflicts involve the early adventures of Helgi and Grímr Droplaugarsynir, who engage in fights with a succession of troublemakers. The final chapters overlap with the subject of the independent *Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana*, possibly the same work as the *Njarðvíkinga saga* [Saga of the People of Njarðvík] mentioned in *Laxdæla saga*, whose author also knew the story of Gunnarr.[25]

24 See Introduction to the saga in *ÍF* 14, p. lxvii.

25 *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 69, *ÍF* 5, pp. 202–4.

The initial action of *Kjalnesinga saga* begins on Kjalarnes, western Iceland, when the son, Þorgrímr, and grandson, Þorsteinn, of a *landnámsmaðr*, Helgi bjóla, become hostile to people in their district who fail to sacrifice to the old gods as fervently as they do themselves. Chief among those they dislike is Búi Andríðsson, the son of an Irish immigrant, who is fostered by a wealthy widow, Esja, also from Ireland. Although a Christian, she practises sorcery and helps Búi evade his enemies in various ways. He kills Þorsteinn while the latter is in the family temple engaged in worship of Þórr and then sets fire to the temple. For this he is outlawed and spends time in a cave, from which he sallies forth to court a beautiful woman, Ólǫf, whom he abducts to live with him in the cave.

His foster-mother decides that it is time for Búi to make himself scarce by travelling overseas. He spends some time in Orkney and then travels on to Norway, where King Haraldr hárfagri [Fair-hair], whose mind has been turned against Búi by some of his Icelandic enemies, sends him off on a dangerous quest to win a gaming board from the giant Dofri in Dofrafjall. Búi travels to Dofri's cave inside the mountain at Yule and meets the giant's large but beautiful daughter, Fríðr, who introduces him to her father. She also takes him as a lover and becomes pregnant by him. Búi succeeds in gaining the gaming board and takes it back to King Haraldr, who subjects him to yet another trial, this time to engage in a wrestling match with a troll-like 'blámaðr' [dark man]. Again Bui succeeds (with the help of two protective magic garments) and the king allows him to return to Iceland. Once there, he is ambushed by one of his old enemies, Kolfiðr, who is also his rival for the beautiful Ólǫf, who has by now had a child by Búi. After killing Kolfiðr, Búi is reunited with his old foster-mother and with his old enemy, Þorgrímr Helgason, marrying his daughter Helga. He becomes a powerful man, inheriting the local *goðorð*. In the final chapter, we hear that the child of Búi and Fríðr, daughter of Dofri, a boy of twelve named Jǫkull, has come to Iceland to visit his father. Búi refuses to acknowledge him as his own son, and Fríðr's prediction that he would suffer consequences, if that happened, comes true, as Búi falls on a stone after wrestling with his son and breaks his ribs, dying three days later. Jǫkull, mortified by what he has done, rides away, goes abroad and is not heard of again (at least not according to this saga).[26]

This saga presents the hostilities between its Icelandic characters as motivated largely by religious differences, and in that respect and in some other similarities, it is reminiscent of the Bjálkaland episode of *Qrvar-Odds*

[26] There is an independent *þáttr* about Jǫkull, *Jǫkuls þáttr Búasonar* (*ÍF* 14, pp. 45–59), that takes up his life story after the conclusion of *Kjalnesinga saga* and, after many fantastic adventures, has him end up as the king of Serkland, the land of the Saracens, probably imagined as somewhere in Asia Minor or North Africa.

saga.[27] The encounter between Búi and Dofri's daughter Fríðr is also reminiscent of another episode in the same saga, in which Oddr encounters a giant's daughter with whom he has a sexual relationship and amuses the giants because of his small size, like a baby, a *skeggbarn* 'bearded child', as *Kjalnesinga saga* puts it.[28] The section of the saga set in Norway reads like an indigenous romance, while the Icelandic parts are hard to categorise. The early chapters are rather episodic and the characters somewhat perfunctory and underdeveloped.

Þorskfirðinga saga (or *Gull-Þóris saga*) begins in the Þorskafjörður area of western Iceland. After a large roll-call of early settlers of the region, based largely on *Landnámabók*, the narrative concentrates on the young Þórir Oddsson, the strongest and best of a group of young men who spend their time playing ball games. His second-in-command is one Ketilbjörn. With Þórir as their leader, the group takes ship for Norway, where a relative, Sigmundr, directs them north to a man named Úlfr in order to go fishing, something Þórir considers beneath him. Instead his attention is taken by fire burning over a mound (*haugaeldr*), which belongs to a dead berserk named Agnarr. Þórir at once decides to investigate. He has a dream in which Agnarr, a large man in a red tunic, appears before him and promises him many gifts if he desists from breaking into his own mound and instead plunders the cave of another viking, by the name of Valr. This Valr, Agnarr says, once carried a load of gold up into a cave in Finnmark and, with his sons, lay down upon it. There they eventually turned into flying dragons. Þórir wakes from his dream, sees all the goods Agnarr has left him, and is instructed to drink from a chalice but to leave some of the liquid in the cup. Þórir disobeys this instruction, and Agnarr reappears, warning him that he will pay for that illicit drink in later life.

Together with Ketilbjörn, Þórir proceeds to plunder Valr's cave. He gains even more wealth from this exploit and distributes some of it to his companions. Various adventures now follow in Norway and Sweden, but the men eventually return to Iceland. From this point (Chapter 7) the saga changes gear somewhat, and the action becomes less fantastic, but still maintains a partial foothold in the uncanny, with several of the participants in the many hostilities that ensue, including the hero, Þórir, being able to shape-shift when circumstances require.

27 See the edition of R. C. Boer, *Qrvar-Odds saga* (Leiden, 1888), pp. 181–4 and the English translation by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Seven Viking Romances* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985), pp. 111–16; for the poetry see *Qrv* 59–70^{VIII} and the Introduction to these stanzas in *SkP* VIII (2017), pp. 872–3.

28 Ch. 14, *ÍF* 14, p. 32. Cf. Qrvar-Oddr's adventures in *Risaland* [Giantland] and *Qrv* 30^{VIII}. These adventures are only recorded in the fifteenth-century manuscripts of the saga, AM 343 a 4to and AM 471 4to.

As soon as Þórir returns to Iceland, where he is able to follow a lavish lifestyle on account of all his gold, his enemies devise one plot after another to ambush and kill him. These plans involve a number of characters who are introduced into the narrative one after the other, with the narrator assiduously informing the audience of places in the countryside named after their exploits. In the end Þórir defeats all his enemies but becomes more avaricious and harder to deal with the older he gets. Eventually he disappears mysteriously and rumour has it that he has turned into a dragon and lain down on his gold chests, which have also disappeared. The narrator does not draw a moral here, but one is left to infer that the drop of liquid Þórir failed to leave in the chalice Agnarr gave him symbolised a flaw in his character that led him to value gold above all else and, in his single-minded devotion to the precious metal, to transform himself from human into dragon.

There are several common features of the four late sagas without poetry that suggest why their authors may not have been drawn to the use of verse. All four combine an historicist, sometimes an antiquarian perspective on their subject matter with an expanded consciousness of the influence of paranormal forces on the characters' lives and in the general action of these sagas. The historicist perspective, which is probably what has led to their being conventionally classified as sagas of Icelanders rather than as *fornaldarsögur* or romances, is evident in the authors' recourse to material from *Landnámabók* and allusions to the subjects of other extant sagas in order to establish the basis of their stories and legitimise their characters in a rural, Icelandic setting. An antiquarian perspective is apparent in some of them too: in the frequent reference to local toponyms said to derive from events and persons of the narrative (as in *Gull-Þóris saga*), or in elaborate descriptions of heathen temples, rituals and beliefs (as in *Kjalnesinga saga*). By contrast, episodes of these sagas set outside Iceland have clear affinities with the subject matter of *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous romances. What is interesting about them from a literary point of view is how the historicist and fantastic modes come together, not always successfully. This particular combination of modes was probably not conducive to the use of poetry, especially in connection with the authors' characterisation of their protagonists. Many of the historicist passages introduce a large cast of characters but do not bring them to life in any detail, while the characterisation of the romance or fabulous episodes tends to be stereotyped and superficial: the hero is very strong and better than his contemporaries at all sports and games, as well as being extremely handsome.[29] Besides, neither translated nor indig-

[29] See the initial characterisation of Þórir Oddsson in *Þorskfirðinga saga* ch. 1, *ÍF* 13, p. 178: 'þeira son var Þórir, manna mestr ok fríðastr sýnum' [their son was Þórir, the largest of men and most handsome in appearance]; ch. 2, *ÍF* 13, p. 181: 'Þórir Oddsson var sterkastr jafngamall, ok allar íþróttir hafði hann umfram sína

enous romances included poetry as a general rule, and this may have been another reason why authors avoided the use of verse if they regarded their works as akin to indigenous romances. If, on the other hand, the connection with the substance of *fornaldarsögur* was uppermost in the authors' minds, the appropriate kind of poetry would have been eddic rather than skaldic.

Conclusion

The foregoing search for reasons why the authors of a relatively small group of sagas of Icelanders chose a prose medium alone without the embellishment of poetry has predictably turned up a number of suggestions to explain its absence. As we are unable to interrogate medieval authors on this subject, the suggestions advanced here will remain speculative. However, they make sense in the context of the earlier chapters in this book, which have been engaged in exploring what happened in the development of *prosimetrum* in sagas of Icelanders in terms of their subject matter, characterisation, narrative mode and stylistic resources. The twelve sagas without poetry reveal roads not taken, in terms of the *prosimetrum*, but at the same time roads that led to several different ways of composing sagas about Icelanders. The four early northern sagas specialise in the fast-moving, incisive exposition of feuding and local politics. They are tales of action and, with a small number of exceptions, mentioned above, do not dwell on the inner worlds of their characters. The same is true of *Hrafnkels saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, both sagas whose narrative focus is narrower than that of the northern group, although they share with it a concentration upon action and the externalised focalisation of character. The four late sagas without poetry take a different road, one that must have been influenced by the popularity of legendary and romance subjects in later medieval Iceland. They combine narrative episodes set in Iceland with fabulous adventures of their heroes in Norway and more exotic parts of the world, including Byzantium and points further east. They thus straddle the sub-generic boundaries of sagas of Icelanders, *fornaldarsögur* and indigenous romances. The absence of poetry in these late sagas suggests that the last two sub-genres must have been more dominant in their authors' minds than the prosimetrical model of the family saga.

We have seen that a high proportion of the sagas without poetry are set in either the north, north-east or east of Iceland. While these regional connections are not universal, the similarity of location does suggest that local traditions and local centres of literary activity were probably important in determining whether or not poetry was incorporated into a particular saga. In the north, the monastery of Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður and the large

jafnaldra' [Þórir Oddsson was the strongest of those of the same age and he outdid his contemporaries in all sports].

farm of Möðruvellir are both potentially important in determining the kind of vernacular sagas composed in their region, and the fact that these two locations were once owned by major characters in early sagas[30] makes it very likely that their descendants would have had a say in determining the kind of saga that was to be composed about their ancestors. It is difficult to see similar connections in the east, where the main centre of literary activity was at the Augustinian house of Þykkvabær, while in the west there were several centres to choose from, though none clearly linked to any of the sagas without poetry, except for the possible connection of *Vatnsdœla saga* to Þingeyrar monastery in the north-west.

The fact that poetry is known to exist about some of the characters of these verse-less sagas does suggest that the omission of poetry in some of them was a deliberate turning away from the use of verse. Haukr Valdísarson, composing his *Íslendingadrápa* probably in the late twelfth century, had no qualms about celebrating several of the heroes of at least three of these verse-less sagas: the protagonists of *Vápnfirðinga saga* in stanzas I–4, Glúmr Geirason (*Reykdœla saga*) in stanza II and Finnbogi inn rammi (*Finnboga saga*) in stanza I4. Both Glúmr Geirason and Einarr þveræingr Eyjólfsson, who appear as characters in verse-less sagas, are known independently as poets from manuscripts of kings' sagas and have extant court poetry attributed to them. It is hard to believe that these men and others would not have composed poetry about the events in which they participated back in Iceland, and, in Einarr's case (Eþver Lv 2 (*Glúm* II), *Víga-Glúms saga* and the Þórðarbók version of *Landnámabók* confirm this.

30 See footnote II above.

Table 8. Sagas of Icelanders without Poetry

Saga	Date	Location
Early		
Grænlendinga saga	c. 1200–30[i] or c. 1300	Greenland, Skagafjörður (1 stanza = Anon *Hafg* 2[IV])
Ljósvetninga saga	1230–50, or c.1220[ii]	north, Eyjafjörður, Reykjadalur, Ljósavatn
Reykdœla saga	c. 1250, or c.1225[iii]	north, Reykjadalur, Eyjafjörður (1 stanza = *Glúm* 3)
Valla-Ljóts saga	1220–40 or 'any time during C13th'[iv]	north, Svafaðardalur, Eyjafjörður
Vápnfirðinga saga	c. 1225–50	north-east/east, Vopnafjörður, Mývatn, North and South Múlasýsla
'Classical'		
Hrafnkels saga	c. 1263[v] or c. 1300	east/north-east, North and South Múlasýsla
Hœnsa-Þóris saga	c. 1250–70	west, Reykjardalur, Breiðafjörður
Vatnsdœla saga	1270–80	north-west/west, Vatnsdalur, Húnavatnsþing, Skagafjörður (1 stanza = *Hallfr* 1)
Late		
Finnboga saga ramma	1300–50	north/north-west, Eyjafjörður, Vatnsdalur, Miðfjörður
Fljótsdœla saga	1300–1400[vi] or 1500–59	east and scattered elsewhere
Gull-Þóris saga/ Þorskfirðinga saga	1300–50	Vestfirðir, Þorskafjörður, Króksfjörður
Kjalnesinga saga	1310–20	south-west, Kjalarnes

Notes:
[i] Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grœnland í miðaldaritum* (Reykjavík, 1978), pp. 398–400.
[ii] Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland. Ljósvetninga saga and Valla-Ljóts saga* (Stanford, California, 1989), p. 84.
[iii] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, p. 82.
[iv] Andersson and Miller, *Law and Literature*, p. 85.
[v] Hermann Pálsson, *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga* (Copenhagen, 1971), p. 14.
[vi] Stefán Karlsson, 'Aldur Fljótsdœla sögu', in Gísli Sigurðsson *et al.* (eds), *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1994), II, pp. 743–59. Repr. in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (ed.), *Stafkrókar: Ritgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson gefnar út í tilefni af sjötugsafmœli hans 2. desember 1998* (Reykjavík, 1998), pp. 119–34.

CONCLUSION

The present study has revealed many different ways in which the authors of sagas of Icelanders combined verse and prose. From the first appearance of these sagas, arguably in the early part of the thirteenth century, there seems to have been a variety of approaches that determined the nature of the textual product, probably the result of several factors, most of which can only be guessed at. They may have included the availability of suitable orally transmitted poetry; perhaps the existence of some stanzas that had already been recorded in written form together with accompanying prose; the attitude of the saga author or authors towards the use of poetry; the encouragement or lack of it from a patron, a local religious house or other sponsor; and the varying levels of skill in literary creativity that the saga author (or authors) brought to the task of incorporating poetry within a prose narrative, or in composing it themselves.

The evidence from extant sagas indicates that two particular trends emerged amongst the earliest sagas of Icelanders. The first was to avoid the use of poetry altogether, as we have discussed in Chapter 8, and instead to develop an episodic and fast-moving narrative style that was externalised in terms of characterisation. This trend seems to have been connected with a northern and eastern school of saga writing. The second trend, which is associated particularly with the poets' sagas, was to create a *prosimetrum* comprising a set of situational stanzas attributed largely to male poet-protagonists and their local rivals for the attention of a woman. This type of *prosimetrum* to a large extent dominated the narrative of *Fóstbrœðra saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Kormáks saga* and *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, among the oldest sagas. In *Kormáks saga* the poetry is so copious and the prose so meagre that most modern critics regard the saga as a whole as defective, even though some of the poetry itself is marvellous.

It is a reasonable assumption that the poets' sagas grew out of material that had already been at least partially textualised in stories and traditions centred around those kings of Norway who were the patrons of the court poets Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Kormákr Ǫgmundarson, Bjǫrn Arngeirsson, Þorgeirr Hávarsson and Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason. The idea of expanding known stories about these Icelanders into narratives set in Iceland

on the subject of their love affairs with local women may have been influenced by foreign romances. Whatever the catalyst, the incorporation of situational stanzas into localised stories must have made a dramatic impression on the receiving audience. In *Fóstbrœðra saga*, which follows a course in which there is both a love interest and an interest in memorialising a particular court poet (Þorgeirr) on the part of his foster-brother (Þormóðr), we see an alternative model, which seems not to have had successors.[1] *Egils saga* can also be seen as a variant on the poets' saga model, in which the love interest is reduced and domesticated (Egill marries his dead brother's Norwegian widow) but the interest in Norwegian courtly society is increased, albeit negatively, through Egill's long-lasting antagonism to Eiríkr blóðøx Haraldsson and his wife Gunnhildr, but also positively through his friendship with the *hersir* Arinbjǫrn Þórisson.

One practice that was tried but did not continue after the early period was the use of authenticating, as opposed to situational, stanzas in the *prosimetrum*.[2] The likely reasons for this abandonment have been canvassed in Chapters 1–2, where we have noted the documented existence of praise-poetry about local chieftains which is, however, almost never cited in sagas of Icelanders. I have argued that the use of authenticating poetry in sagas that focus on the personal lives of their protagonists would not have contributed to the overall interiority of this new sub-genre and was therefore avoided. However, there are some sagas that use poetry in authenticating mode to a limited extent, such as the probably early *Heiðarvíga saga*, and the somewhat later *Eyrbyggja saga*. The latter evinces a great interest in poetry of all kinds, including poetry by local skalds (Oddr breiðfirðingr and Þormóðr Trefilsson) in honour of Snorri *goði*, as well as the *Máhlíðingavísur* by Þórarinn svarti Þórólfsson, the longest sequence of skaldic stanzas on a single subject in any of the sagas of Icelanders.

It is difficult to account for trends in the use of poetry in the middle or 'classical' period of saga composition because the evidence is conflicting. I have proposed tentatively that the *prosimetrum* may have fallen somewhat out of fashion in this period, pointing to the evidence of *Hrafnkels saga* and *Hœnsa-Þóris saga*, which contain no poetry, and the sparse citation of poetry in *Laxdœla saga*, even though the writer of that work shows his interest in the subject by referring several times to poets and poetry. In complete contrast, if we are to date *Gísla saga* to c. 1250, this is a work of the middle period

1 Mikael Males, '*Fóstbrœðra Saga*: A Missing Link?', *Gripla*, 31 (2020), 72–102, has recently put forward a case for considering *Fóstbrœðra saga* as the pioneer of the *Íslendingasaga* form.

2 Possible exceptions to this generalisation are the two stanzas, Þelf Lv 1 (*Nj* 27) and ÞormÓl Lv 1 (*Nj* 28 (Add 25), if these are parts of long poems celebrating Gunnarr's last stand rather than *lausavísur*.

which incorporates a great deal of emotionally intense, situational poetry into its text, and displays rare psychological insights into its characters' lives by combining the resources of prose and poetry.

What happened to the *prosimetrum* of sagas of Icelanders in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries can be best explained as a reaction to the development of other saga genres, particularly the *fornaldarsögur* and the translated and indigenous romances that attained great popularity in Iceland during this period. The situational mode bounced back, as the additional stanzas in *Njáls saga* clearly demonstrate, except in the case of four sagas whose plots are closer in character to the romance or the *fornaldarsaga*. The renewed presence of poetry in late sagas of Icelanders most likely catered to the tastes of audiences whose literary diets included long *ævikviður*, encounters with supernatural beings, and other poetry popular in *fornaldarsögur*, although these were usually not in skaldic metres. Perhaps the fact that skaldic poetry continued to be attributed to characters in late sagas of Icelanders gave them an elite cachet. Certainly in comparison with romances, that contained no poetry, sagas like *Víglundar saga* and *Friðþjófs saga* added an extra fillip of lyricism to their texts. The fact that women's interests may have had something to do with changing tastes for skaldic poetry in late sagas of Icelanders has been presented in this study as a likely contributor to the renewed popularity of the *prosimetrum* in the later period, along with the small but significant increase in the presentation of female speakers of poetry in late sagas. In the end it was not only Everyman who could speak in verse in sagas of Icelanders – some members of the species Everywoman could do so too.

GLOSSARY OF OLD NORSE TERMS

aðalhending	'noble rhyme, chief [i.e. full internal] rhyme'
drápa (pl. *drápur*)	long skaldic poem with a refrain (*stef*)
draugr (pl. *draugar*)	a revenant
dróttkvætt	court metre
dunhent	'echoing rhymed', a variant of *dróttkvætt*
dæmi	example (cf. Latin *exemplum*)
erfidrápa	memorial poem
fjórðungr	couplet (in an eight-line stanza)
flím	libel, lampoon
flokkr (pl. *flokkar*)	long skaldic poem without a refrain
fornaldarsaga (pl. *fornaldarsögur*)	saga of the ancient time, legendary saga
fornyrðislag	old story metre
galdralag	incantations' metre
goði	chieftain with some religious responsibilities, holder of a *goðorð*
goðorð	office and authority of a *goði*
greppaminni	'poets' reminder', *dróttkvætt* variant involving a series of questions and answers
hálfhnept	'half-curtailed', a skaldic metre
heiti	poetic synonym
helmingr (pl. *helmingar*)	half-stanza of four lines (of an eight-line stanza)

hending	lit. ‘catching’, rhyme (see *aðalhending*, *skothending*)
hersir	district chieftain (Norwegian)
hrynhent	‘flowing rhymed’, a skaldic metre, expanded version of *dróttkvætt*
Íslendingasaga (pl. *Íslendingasögur*)	saga of Icelanders, family saga
kenning	a nominal periphrasis, consisting of a base-word and one or more determinants
konungasögur	kings’ sagas, royal biographies
kviðlingr	a ditty, short poem
kviðuháttr	‘poem’s form’, a poetic metre, variant of *fornyrðislag*
kvæði	poem
landnámsmaðr	lit. ‘man of land-taking’, [early] settler, colonist
lausavísa (pl. *lausavísur*)	lit. ‘loose verse’, free-standing stanza
ljóðaháttr	songs’ form, a poetic metre
lofkvæði	praise-poem
málaháttr	speeches’ form, a poetic metre
mannjafnaðr	comparison of men
mansǫngr	love-song
mansǫngsvísur	love verses
níð	insult, calumny, slander
níðvísur	slander verses
nýgerving	lit. ‘new creation’; an extension of a metaphor from one kenning to another or to the verb of a clause
ofljóst	lit. ‘excessively clear’, punning, word-play on homonyms and/or synonyms
riddarasaga (pl. *riddarasögur*)	saga of knights, romance
runhent	end-rhymed
saga (pl. *sǫgur*)	vernacular prose narrative, often including stanzas of poetry
samtíðarsaga (pl. *samtíðarsögur*)	contemporary saga

senna	flyting, debate
skáld (earlier *skald*)	poet (usually a poet composing in skaldic metres)
skáldasögur	poets' sagas (a group of poets' biographies within the *Íslendingasögur*)
skothending	'partial rhyme', assonance
stef	refrain (see *drápa*)
upphaf	beginning section (of a poem)
tvískelft	'twice trembled', metrical variant of *dróttkvætt*
vísa (pl. *vísur*)	stanza, verse
ævikviða (pl. *ævikviður*)	life-poem, autobiography
þáttr (pl. *þættir*)	short tale

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INDEX

abbreviations xxix–xxxvi
aðalhending 60, 63, 64, 200
Andersson, Theodore M. 145, 180
  Andersson, Theodore M. and William Ian Miller 180–1, 184, 196
Arinbjǫrn *hersir* Þórisson 84–5, 105–6, 154, 172, 198, 201 S*ee also* Egill Skalla-Grímsson, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*
Ármann Jakobsson 11, 159
Arnold, Martin 91
Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson (skald) 38–9, 45, 62
  Hermundardrápa 38, 45–6
Árón Hjǫrleifsson 41
authenticity, literary 6, 31–2, 51–2, 56–7, 86
  of poetry in sagas of Icelanders 17, 18, 31–2, 37, 55–8, 58–9, 67–76, 92–3, 135–6, 143–4, 146–7, 155
  concept of fictionality 5, 57–8, 79–81, 135–6
  See also dating of poetry in sagas of Icelanders, Everyman a poet

Bampi, Massimiliano 10, 86
Bandamanna saga (*Band*) 22, 24, 27, 38, 105, 109, 159, 172, 173
Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (*Bárð*) 19–20, 22, 24, 27, 37, 45, 85, 106, 109, 146, 157, 158, 160, 161–3
Barnes, Geraldine 57
Beowulf 90
Bergbúa þáttr (*Bergb*) 22, 24, 26, 49, 49, 70, 160, 161
Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa (*BjH*) 13, 14, 22, 24, 25, 29, 38, 39, 44, 47, 48, 49, 66, 69, 87–8, 108, 147, 148, 197
  Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi Arngeirsson (skald) 47, 49, 70, 79, 82, 87, 88, 146, 197
  See also Þórðr Kolbeinsson (skald)
Bjarni Einarsson 5, 7, 145
Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson (skald) 60, 70, 82, 108, 146, 147 S*ee also Eyrbyggja saga*
Björn Magnússon Ólsen 34
Bruhn, Ole 43
Brúsi Hallason (skald) 30
Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir 155
Bugge, Sophus 154
Byock, Jesse 106, 107

Callow, Chris 180
Clover, Carol J. 3
Clunies Ross, Margaret 2, 10, 13, 16–17, 20, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 40, 44, 52, 83, 84, 88, 101, 106, 134, 153, 159
communication, strategies of, in poetry of sagas of Icelanders 77–97
  compositional units, traditional 86–90
  distribution of stanzas within prose texts 81–6
    clustering and dispersal 70, 83–5, 90–3
  exemplary citation of poetic stanzas 77–8
  long poems broken up and staged as *lausavísur* 15, 42, 77, 79, 94–5,
  question-and-answer method of citation 16, 93–7
    models for this 96–7
  See also extended poems
Cormack, Margaret 39
Craigie's law 64, 177

Darraðarljóð 13, 21, 27, 37, 50, 74–5, 79, 169
dating of poetry in sagas of Icelanders 10, 12, 17–18, 43, 67–76
  linguistic and metrical criteria 18, 59–64, 73, 91
    archaic linguistic forms 60–2
    archaisation, deliberate 67–9
    metrical criteria 62–4
    indicators of late composition 63–4, 69
  contextual criteria 59, 63, 65–7
  See also authenticity, literary
Donatus, Aelius 96
drápa (pl. *drápur*) 7, 16, 37, 39, 40, 100, 200
Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar (*ÞSHDr*) 22, 24, 157, 158, 160, 161, 163, 174
Droplaugarsona saga (*Dpl*) 14, 22, 24, 25, 70, 81, 101, 160, 181, 189, 190
dróttkvætt metre 2, 18, 21, 41, 60, 64, 85, 88, 162–3, 165, 168, 178, 200

eddic poetry 3, 5, 86, 96, 97, 164–5, 189
editing practice 53–4, 149, 150–1, 155
Egill Skalla-Grímsson (skald) 13, 17, 29, 40, 57, 70, 82, 101, 149, 154–5, 161
  Arinbjarnarkviða (*Arkv*) 23, 29, 30, 40, 47, 70, 84, 155
  fragments of long poems 47
  Hǫfuðlausn (*Hfl*) 23, 29, 40, 41, 47, 70, 83, 105, 155
  lausavísur 29, 62–3, 65–6, 70, 83–4, 103, 154
  Sonatorrek (*St*) 23, 29, 45, 70, 104, 105, 155
  See also Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar
Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (*Eg*) 13, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 40, 44, 47, 53, 61, 62, 63, 75, 81–2, 83–5, 104–6, 147, 155, 159, 198 S*ee also* Egill Skalla-Grímsson (skald)
Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 10, 68, 70, 93, 187
Einarr skálaglamm Helgason (skald) 77, 84, 134–5, 137–8, 140
Einarr þveræingr Eyjólfsson (skald) 30, 181–2, 184, 185, 195
Eiríkr viðsjá (skald) 14, 15–16, 25, 29, 70, 80, 94, 152
Eiríks saga rauða (*Eir*) 19, 23, 24, 26, 71
Elucidarius 96
encomia, courtly 4–9, 12, 13–14, 16, 31, 33–4, 36–7, 43–4, 47–8, 106, 138, 197–8
  encomia for Icelanders of Settlement Age 36–40, 42, 45–6, 78–9, 152
  See also poetry and social prestige in saga Iceland
erfidrápa 38, 39, 40, 45, 86, 100, 200
Everyman a poet, literary fiction 31–5, 42–4, 52, 135–6
  concept based in Icelandic view of poetry's high status 32–3, 35, 135
  See also encomia, courtly, kings' sagas, myth of mead of poetry
extended poems 13–14, 15, 36–41, 45–50, 152 S*ee also drápa*, *flokkr*, *lausavísur*
Eyrbyggja saga (*Eb*) 12–13, 14–15, 22, 24, 25, 29, 31, 39, 42, 45, 49, 53, 60, 65, 70, 78, 94–5, 136, 141, 147, 160, 161, 198 S*ee also* Bjǫrn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson, Oddr breiðfirðingr, Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr Þórólfsson, Þormóðr Trefilsson
Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson (skald) 8, 138–9, 140

Faulkes, Anthony 34, 78, 97
Fidjestøl, Bjarne 61–2, 139, 144, 145
Finlay, Alison 87, 145
Finnboga saga ramma (*Finnb*) 23, 24, 27, 157, 159, 178, 189–90, 195
Finnur Jónsson xxxii, 2, 18, 32, 40, 54, 59, 62, 76, 137, 154, 176
First Grammatical Treatise 34, 68
flím 86, 87, 200
Fljótsdœla saga (*Flj*) 23, 24, 27, 157, 178, 181, 189, 190, 196
Flóamanna saga (*Flóam*) 23, 24, 27, 157, 160, 161
flokkr (pl. *flokkar*) 7, 16, 55, 200
Foote, Peter G. 18, 67, 72
fornaldarsögur 4–5, 20, 53–5, 75, 87–9, 92, 96, 97, 100, 159–61, 163, 178, 189, 200
fornyrðislag (old story metre) 5, 37, 60, 74, 85, 88, 162–3, 178, 200
Fóstbrœðra saga (*Fbr*) 13, 22, 24, 25, 44,

45, 49, 70, 76, 79, 80, 147, 151, 160, 197, 198 S*ee also* Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason
Fourth Grammatical Treatise (*FoGT*) 16, 29, 34
Frank, Roberta 2, 145, 154, 173
Friðþjófs saga ins frœkna 159, 162, 164, 199
Fulk, R. D. 8, 21, 27, 70, 74, 75, 90, 164, 169

Gade, Kari Ellen 6, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20, 33, 36, 58, 59, 64, 68, 71–3, 85, 165, 170, 174, 176
galdralag 174, 200
Gautreks saga (*Gautr*) 100
Gellir Þorkelsson 39, 45 S*ee also* Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson
Gestr Þórhallsson (skald) 25, 29, 30, 70
Gísla saga Súrssonar (*Gísl*) 17–18, 22, 24, 26, 39, 59, 60, 66, 67, 69, 71–3, 86, 147, 148, 155–6, 161, 165, 171, 174, 198–9
Gísli Súrsson (skald) 82, 83, 102–3, 104
Gísli Sigurðsson 34, 180
Glauser, Jürg 52
Glúmr Geirason (skald) 183, 195
Grettisfœrsla 22, 76, 161
Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar (*Gr*) 13, 20–1, 22, 24, 27, 29, 45, 50, 71, 74, 75–6, 80, 88–9, 94, 95–6, 100, 104, 157, 158, 163, 166–8, 170, 171, 172–3
Grettir Ásmundarson (skald) 29, 50, 75, 82, 83, 88–9, 100, 101, 109
Sǫðulkolluvísur 20, 37, 50
See also late sagas of Icelanders
Gropper, Stefanie 52
Grottasǫngr 79
Grœnlendinga saga (*Grœn*) 23, 24, 25, 71, 78, 82, 182, 196
Grønlie, Siân 85
Guðmundr inn ríki Eyjólfsson 181, 182, 185
Guðmundr Svertingsson (skald) 41
Guðrún Nordal 5–6, 33, 34, 41, 67–8, 151, 158, 180
Gull-Þóris saga (*Gullþ*), also known as *Þorskfirðinga saga* 23, 24, 28, 157, 178, 189, 192–3, 196
Gunnar Karlsson 35
Gunnars þáttr Þiðrandabana 190
Gunnlaugs saga (*Gunnl*) 13, 14, 17, 22, 24, 26, 29, 38, 40–1, 44, 45, 47, 53, 66, 71, 80, 147
Gunnlaugr ormstunga Illugason (skald) 38, 41, 47, 71, 82, 146

Haðarlag 39
Hafgerðingadrápa 23, 25, 179, 182, 196
Hagbarðr, legendary figure 153
Háleygjatal 36
hálfhnept metre 60, 200
Hallfreðar saga (*Hallfr*) 13, 17, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 44, 48, 50, 70, 80, 105, 107, 138, 148, 149, 152, 160, 188, 196, 197
Hallfreðr Óttarsson (skald) 17, 23, 48, 50, 82, 100, 108, 142, 143, 146, 197
Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson, King (skald) 148, 170
Hárbarðsljóð 97
Harðar saga Grímkelssonar (*Harð*) 5, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 31, 63–4, 74, 83, 89, 106, 146, 157, 161–3, 168
Hǫrðr Grímkelsson (skald) 83
Harris, Joseph 3–4, 13, 31, 65
Hastrup, Kirsten 107
Haukr Valdísarson (skald), *Íslendingadrápa* 43, 172, 183, 184, 189, 195
Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir 63
Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings (*Háv*) 19–20, 22, 24, 27, 74, 101, 157, 175, 176–7
Heiðarvíga saga (*Heið*) 14, 15, 22, 24, 25, 29, 30, 38, 65, 70, 78, 80, 94, 96, 147, 198
heiti xxxvii–xxxviii, 2, 64, 137–8, 200 S*ee also* style, voice and diction in the poetry of sagas of Icelanders
Hermann Pálsson 26, 196
Hermundr Illugason 38, 45–6 S*ee also* Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson
Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks (*Heiðr*) 4
Heslop, Kate 15, 76, 78, 95, 141, 161
Heusler, Andreas 96
Hólmgǫngu-Bersi Véleifsson (skald) 30, 89, 92, 104–5, 140, 143 S*ee also Kormáks saga*
Holtsmark, Anne 177
Housman, A. E. 58

Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða (*Hrafnk*) 18, 23, 24, 26, 71, 181, 186, 188, 190, 196, 198
Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and his circle 41
See also Guðmundr Svertingsson
Hreinn Benediktsson 34, 62
hrynhent metre 21, 41, 64, 162, 168, 201
Hœnsa-Þoris saga (*Hœns*) 18, 23, 24, 26, 71, 160, 186, 187, 188, 196, 198

Illugi svarti Hallkelsson 37–8, 94, 136
See also Oddr breiðfirðingr, Tindr Hallkelsson
Íslendingabók of Ari Þorgilsson 18

Jakob Benediktsson 66, 175
Jesch, Judith 2, 8
Jochens, Jenny 101
Jómsvíkinga saga 84
Jónas Kristjánsson 85, 158
Jón Helgason 17, 40, 84, 155
Jón Loptsson of Oddi 36

kennings (*kenningar*) xxxvii–xxxviii, 2, 64, 73, 99, 137–8, 139–56, 173–4, 201
half-kennings 69, 150–1
'incomplete' kennings 149–50
See also style, voice and diction in sagas of Icelanders
Ketils saga hœngs (*Ket*) 88, 163
kings' sagas (*konungasögur*) 5, 7–9, 13–14, 43, 54, 77, 134–6, 145, 147, 165, 195, 197, 201
Kjalnesinga saga (*Kjaln*) 23, 24, 27, 157, 160, 178, 189, 191–2, 193, 196
Kock, E. A. 32, 54
Konráð Gíslason 59, 62
Kormáks saga Ǫgmundarsonar (*Korm*) 13, 22, 24, 25, 30, 44, 60–1, 63, 66, 70, 71, 75, 79–80, 82, 89, 90–3, 108, 140, 142, 148, 149, 150, 152, 153–4, 155, 160, 197
Kormákr Ǫgmundarson (skald) 23, 30, 82, 109, 142, 146, 197
See also Hólmgǫngu-Bersi Véleifsson
Krákumál, anonymous poem 66, 92–3
S*ee also Kormáks saga*
Kreutzer, Gert 33
Kristni saga (*Kristni*) 21, 22, 24, 27, 74
Króka-Refs saga (*Krók*) 20, 23, 24, 27, 74, 157, 161
Kuhn, Hans 2, 59, 61, 62
Kumblbúa þáttr (*Kumbl*) 23, 24, 26, 82, 160, 161
kviðuháttr metre 20, 76, 88, 178, 201

Landnámabók (*Ldn*) 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 27, 29, 30, 37, 38, 45, 46, 74, 75, 83, 85, 89, 95, 161, 175, 176, 179, 192–3, 195
Langeslag, P. S. 102
Larrington, Carolyne 3, 86
late sagas of Icelanders, innovations in 157–77, 199
added female interest 161–5
changes in the *prosimetrum* 165–77
competition with romances and *fornaldarsögur* 158–9
See also fornaldarsögur, *prosimetrum* in sagas of Icelanders, *riddarasögur* (sagas of knights, romances), women as characters in sagas of Icelanders
Laufás *Edda* 29, 30, 150
lausavísur 8, 13–14, 18, 31, 50, 201 *See also* extended poems
Laxdœla saga (*Laxd*) 19, 22, 24, 26, 31, 39, 45, 71, 81, 85–6, 160, 163, 190, 198
S*ee also* Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, saga of Þorgils Hǫlluson, Úlfr Uggason
Lethbridge, Emily 71, 74, 169
Lindow, John 148
ljóðaháttr 60, 201
Ljósvetninga saga (*Ljósv*) 23, 24, 25, 69, 180–1, 182, 184, 185, 189, 196
lofkvæði (praise-poem) 86, 201
Lokasenna 97
Lönnroth, Lars 19, 20–1, 56–7, 81

Magerøy, Hallvard 78
málaháttr 60, 85, 201
Males, Mikael 34, 54–5, 61, 63, 66, 68, 144, 198
Málsháttakvæði 145
mannjafnaðr 87, 201
manuscripts, Icelandic xxix, xxxvi, 7, 23, 30, 40, 45–6, 47–8, 53–4, 60, 84, 181

indicators of changes in literary taste 159–61
See also late sagas of Icelanders
mansǫngsvísur 33, 86, 201
Marold, Edith 42, 87–8, 93, 154
McKinnell, John 160
Meissner, Rudolf xxxi, 79, 139, 149–50, 173
Merlínusspá by Gunnlaugr Laufsson 179, 187
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 4, 6, 7, 33, 36, 56, 107, 136–7, 142
Munkaþverá monastery 181, 194
Myrvoll, Klaus Johan 6, 12, 18, 20, 58, 59, 66, 69, 72–3, 155, 162
myth of mead of poetry 33, 134–5
Möðruvellir farm 181, 195

níðvísur 33, 37, 49, 50, 86, 87, 142, 201
Njáls saga (*Nj*) 12–13, 19, 20–1, 22, 24, 27, 31, 37, 43, 50, 53, 73–4, 75, 78, 79, 82, 101, 102, 106, 146, 157, 159, 160, 163–4, 174–5, 199
additional stanzas 168–9
Nóregs konunga tal 36

O'Connor, Ralph 57, 103
Oddr breiðfirðingr (skald) 14, 37, 45, 136, 152, 198
Illugadrápa 14, 37, 45, 70, 136
See also Eyrbyggja saga, Illugi svarti Hallkelsson
O'Donoghue, Heather 5, 7, 15, 78, 102, 166, 188
ofljóst (excessively clear) skaldic device 75, 84, 172–3, 201
Ólafur Halldórsson 196
Ormr Barreyjarskáld 55

performance of saga poetry at Reykjahólar wedding 54–7
Perkins, Richard 70, 81
Phillips, A. A. and 'cultural cringe' 36
Plácitusdrápa 179
poetry and social prestige in saga Iceland 35–44, 142–3
elitist nature of extended poetry in sagas of Icelanders 36–40, 42–3, 45–6
paradox of its lack of use in sagas 9, 16, 39–44, 78–9, 152, 198
See also encomia, courtly, extended poems
Poole, Russell 16, 42, 44, 66, 90–1, 94, 145
prosimetrum in sagas of Icelanders 1, 3–4, 5–6, 7–9, 11, 13–14, 69–76, 77–9, 156, 157
'authenticating' versus 'situational' citation 7–9, 14–15, 20–1, 77, 78, 108–9, 135–6, 152–3, 165, 198
discrepancies between verse and prose 79–81, 91–3, 99, 175–7
proportion of verse to prose 11–30
correlated with date of saga 13–21
correlated with type of saga 12, 13
stanzas cited in sources outside saga genre 16–17, 29–30
See also communication, strategies of, in poetry in sagas of Icelanders, extended poems, Everyman a poet, *lausavísur*, late sagas of Icelanders, style, voice and diction in sagas of Icelanders

Quinn, Judy 52, 86

Ragnarsdrápa of Bragi Boddason (skald) 61, 63
regional traditions, importance of 18, 42, 179–82, 194–5, 197 *See also* sagas without poetry
Reykdœla saga (*Reykd*) 23, 24, 25, 69, 82, 178, 180, 182–3, 184, 195, 196
riddarasögur (sagas of knights, romances) 3, 86, 159–61, 163, 164, 178–9, 189, 194, 201
ríma (pl. *rímur*), genre of late Icelandic poetry 21, 158
runhent 178, 201
runic inscriptions in skaldic metres 3
Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson, jarl of Orkney (skald) 8, 145

sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) 1–5, 10–11, 197–9, 201
as a kind of history 5, 178–9

sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) (*cont'd*)
biographical narrative model 82, 83, 85, 101, 189
changes over time 1, 6, 8–9
modern literary studies of 1–2, 10–11, 31, 51–2, 57–8, 86, 87, 91–3, 139, 157, 197
saga authors as composers of poetry 20, 27–8, 58, 66, 74, 95, 157–8, 166, 168, 174
See also prosimetrum in sagas of Icelanders, sagas of outlaws, sagas of poets, sagas without poetry
sagas of outlaws 13, 17, 82, 83, 103, 147
See also sagas of poets (*skáldasögur*)
sagas of poets (*skáldasögur*) 13, 14, 17, 41–2, 43–4, 59, 71, 82–3, 86, 101, 106–8, 136, 147, 197, 198, 202
courtly love and 145–6, 197–8
See also sagas of Icelanders, sagas of outlaws
sagas without poetry 1, 9, 18, 23, 157, 178–96, 197
absence of developed female characters 182, 185–6, 187
affinity with legendary sagas or romances 178, 179, 187–8, 189–94, 199
authorial voice 183, 184–5, 187, 190, 193
episodic and impersonal narrative style 182, 183, 184, 188, 190, 194
location, geographical 179–81, 182, 186, 189, 194, 197
the early group 182–6
the middle group 186–8
the late group 189–94
See also fornaldarsögur, regional traditions, importance of, *riddarasögur* (sagas of knights, romances), sagas of Icelanders
samtíðarsögur (contemporary sagas) 4–5, 41, 54, 103, 165, 201
Schier, Kurt 8
Schorn, Brittany 86
See, Klaus von 2
senna 87, 97, 202
Sif Ríkharðsdóttir 86, 155
sigla for skaldic poetry x–xxviii, xxxii-xxxiv
Sigurður Nordal 70, 136
Sigvatr Þórðarson (skald) 8, 138, 145
Skáldatal 12, 13, 26, 28, 41
skaldic poetry, history of 2–5
Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages (*SkP*) xxxii–xxxiii, 2, 4, 54, 60, 69
skothending 60, 63, 202
Sneglu-Halli (skald) 138
Snorri *goði* Þorgrímsson 39, 45, 94, 141, 198
Snorri Sturluson (skald and skaldic scholar) *Edda* (*SnE*) xxxiv, 16, 27, 29, 30, 34, 38, 40, 45, 46, 55, 65, 68, 71, 75, 77, 83, 95, 96–7, 135, 148, 173–4
Preface to *Heimskringla* 56
Sperber, Hans 149, 151
Stefán Karlsson 28, 159, 160, 196
Ström, Folke 142
Sturla Þórðarson (skald and historian) 17, 39, 75–6, 165, 175
Sturlunga saga 85, 103, 158, 180
Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr (*StjǫrnODr*) 22, 24, 27, 50, 103, 157–8, 160
style, voice and diction in the poetry of sagas of Icelanders 8–9, 42–4, 134–56
changes in diction 137–56
changes in poetic voice 134–6, 138–9, 169–72
discourse of interiority 8, 13, 20–1, 35, 42, 64, 93, 98, 137, 138–9, 152–6, 194
kennings in sagas of Icelanders 139– 56
kennings for men 139–43
kennings for women 145–51
kennings and the supernatural world 140, 143–4, 147–9
representations of the inner and bodily life 151–6
See also heiti, kennings
subjects of poetry in sagas of Icelanders 14, 98–133
death 103–4, 130
dreams and dream poetry 72, 83, 101, 102–3, 113–15, 158, 182
formal poetry 100, 106, 131–3
generosity, gift-giving and friendship 106, 130–1, 139
grief 103–4, 130
killings, battles, and duels 101, 108–9, 121–8, 139, 184–5

male-female relations 87–101, 106–8, 115–21, 145–56, 161, 184–5
miscellaneous 99–100, 133
old age 84, 103, 104–5, 129
outlawry 103, 128–9
personal circumstances 99–100, 110–11
inner world revealed as sombre 109–10
supernatural events, curses and premonitions 70–1, 85, 88–9, 101–2, 111–13, 158, 160–1, 163
Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir 74, 169
Svarfdœla saga (*Svarfd*) 19–20, 22, 24, 27, 30, 74, 80–1, 85, 101, 157, 158, 175–6, 181, 183

Third Grammatical Treatise (*TGT*) of Óláfr Þórðarson 16–17, 29–30, 34, 40, 68, 75
Tindr Hallkelsson (skald) 14, 15, 16, 25, 38, 70, 80, 94, 152 *See also Heiðarvíga saga*
Tirosh, Yoav 11
Torfi H. Tulinius 3, 159
treatises on poetry, Icelandic 16–17, 33–5, 67–8, 77, 156, 173–4
connection with the development of saga form 67–8, 96–7, 158
See also First Grammatical Treatise, *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, Snorri Sturluson *Edda*, *Third Grammatical Treatise*
Turville-Petre, Gabriel 18, 67
tvískelft metre 60, 65, 202 S*ee also dróttkvætt*

Úlfr Uggason (skald), *Húsdrápa* 45 *See also Laxdœla saga*

Valla-Ljóts saga (*Vall*) 23, 24, 25, 69, 180, 183, 184, 196
Vápnfirðinga saga (*Vápn*) 23, 24, 25, 69, 180, 183–4, 186, 195, 196
Vatnsdœla saga (*Vatn*) 23, 24, 26, 82, 135, 160, 178, 186, 187–8, 189, 196
Vésteinn Ólason 5, 10, 12, 51, 98
Víga-Glúms saga (*Glúm*) 14, 22, 24, 25, 30, 45, 61, 62, 69, 70, 80, 160, 161, 181, 183, 195
Víga-Glúmr Eyjólfsson (skald) 14, 30, 102, 104, 184–5
Víglundar saga (*Vígl*) 20, 22, 24, 28, 69, 74, 105, 106, 107–8, 146, 157, 159, 162, 164, 165, 171–2, 199
Vǫlsunga saga 4
Vǫluspá 73, 148
Vǫlu-Steinn (skald) 46

Wellendorf, Jonas 16, 34
Whaley, Diana 7, 38, 71, 91, 143, 147, 182
Wills, Tarrin 11, 174
Wolf, Alois 5
women as characters in sagas of Icelanders 107–8, 144–56, 161–5, 199
as skalds 35–6, 57, 64, 146–7, 157, 162–5
their poetry often simplified 162–3
frequency in late sagas 64, 106–7, 146, 157
See also late sagas of Icelanders, kennings, style, voice and diction in sagas of Icelanders

Ynglingatal 36

þingeyrar monastery 187, 188, 195

Þórarinn svarti máhlíðingr Þórólfsson (skald) 14, 49, 94–5, 103, 141, 198
Máhlíðingavísur 15, 29, 37, 42, 49, 79, 94–5, 141, 198
See also Eyrbyggja saga
Þórðar saga hreðu (*Þórð*) 20, 22, 24, 27, 74, 157, 160
Þórðr Kolbeinsson (skald) 38, 45, 47, 49, 88 *See also Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*
Þorgeir Sigurðsson 30, 40
Þorgils Hǫlluson, lost saga of 19, 26, 71, 81, 86 *See also Laxdœla saga*
Þorgils saga ok Hafliða 54–7 S*ee also* performance of saga poetry at Reykjahólar wedding
Þorleifr jarlsskáld Rauðfeldarson (skald) 74, 175 *See also Landnámabók*, *Svarfdœla saga*
Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason (skald) 45, 70, 79, 80, 82, 103, 147, 149, 197 *See also Fóstbrœðra saga*

Þormóðr Óláfsson (skald) 41
Þormóðr Trefilsson (skald) 14, 15, 39, 45, 141, 152, 198
Hrafnsmál 15, 17, 39, 45, 70, 141
Þorsteins þáttr Austfirðings (*ÞorstAust*) 23
ævikviða (pl. *ævikviður*) 20, 50, 75, 87, 88–9, 95, 100, 199, 202
Örnólfur Thorsson 10–11
Qrvar-Odds saga (*Qrv*) 20, 88, 100, 159, 161, 191–2

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